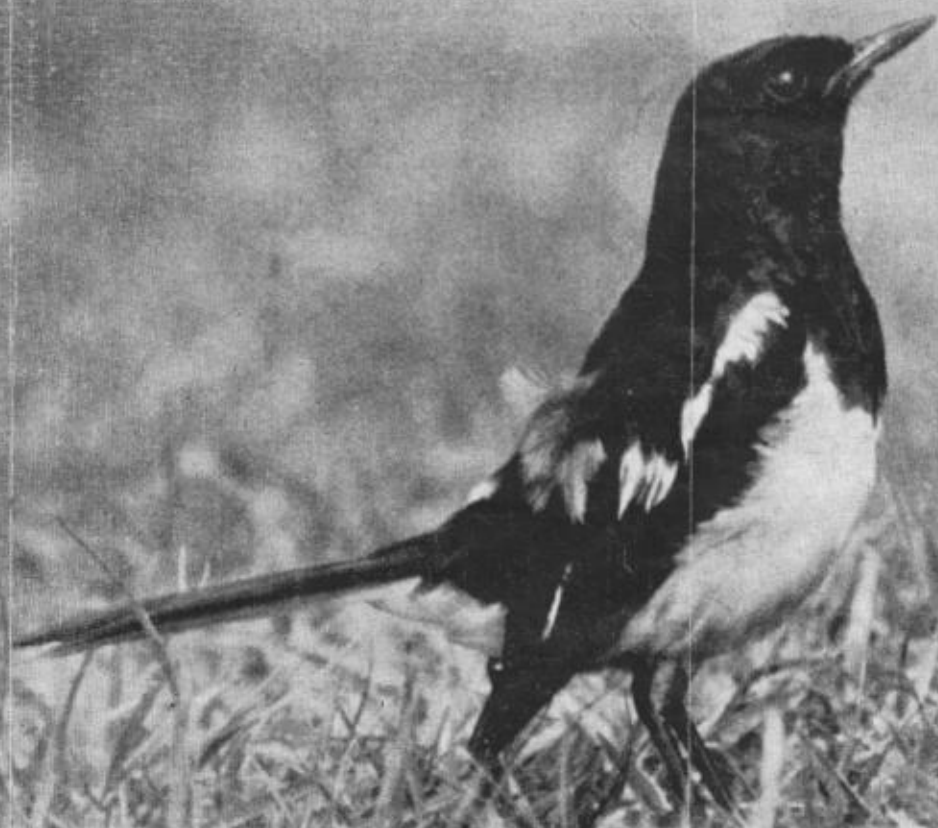


Newsletter for Birdwatchers

VOL. XX NO. 1 JANUARY, 1980



BETTER CARE FOR THE CHILD

The Government of Karnataka has launched special health Programmes for Children of the State to mark the International Year of the Child.

The programmes for the year include launching of supplementary feeding programme to give nutritious food to 50,000 pre-school children ;

Extension of immunisation against poliomyelitis to 2 lakh children in rural areas ;

Administration of vitamin 'A' concentrate solution to 17 lakh children below the age of 4 to prevent blindness ;

Distribution of iron and folic acid tablets to 7 lakh children to control nutritional anaemia.



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NEWSLETTER FOR
BIRDWATCHERS

Vol. XX No. 1

January 1980

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K.K. Surendran Prize: In discussing the K.K. Surendran Prize last year Newsletter (December 78) I had outlined the difficulties of selection and the situation remains unchanged. I do not wish to go over it again and feel that I am in a happy situation to be the solo judge. Had there been a Committee there may have been endless wrangling about who should be the Prize Winner.

I therefore pontificate that Sudhir Vyas is the first among his equals and is awarded the prize for his article 'Additions to the Delhi List' in the November and December issues of the Newsletter of 1979.

EDITOR

Excellent!

2

In Quest of Coastal Birds: 1978-79 Season, by Dr. K.V. Sreenivasan

A tongue-shaped sand-bar less than a hundred feet broad and tapering to a point - one side beaten by the breakers into silky smoothness and sloping gently into the sea, the other bordered halfway through by coconut plantations and then by a river that flows towards the tip of the sand-bar which the river pushes out of its way when the monsoon gives enough strength to do so. Depending upon the tides, the river debouches into the sea or the sea infiltrates into the river in mild aggression. On this coastline flocked waders in impressive numbers, some feeding at the very edge, others on the dry ground higher up. Often the waders assembled to form such huge flocks that it looked as though they were held in a gigantic invisible aviary. This was in September 1978, and the place was a poor fishing village, Poovar, some miles south of that 'Tourist Paradise', Kovalam.

Having at the most only a nodding acquaintance with the waders, I was greatly thrilled and intrigued by this mixed congregation of non-descript 'Snippets'. I watched them for hours and took copious field notes. Homework with Field Guides did not enlighten me. So I took more notes. My confusion grew in proportion to the volume of my notes!

For instance, there was this bird, in size between a sparrow and a magpie robin, with greyish-brown upper parts and white underparts. Legs and beak black; a white hind collar; a white bar on each wing; a white bordered tail. It ran at a good pace; was reluctant to take to its wings. Flew low over the water (only a foot or two above the waves). Landed a few yards away on the shore and resumed its feeding. Not at all shy, it allowed approach to about ten feet. I put them down as '? Lesser Sandplover'. Some of them had a white forehead; some had no white hind-collar.

The Poovar beach was an ideal home for these birds. Human beings frequenting this place fell into two groups only: fishermen, and people en route to some nearby haven to imbibe illicit liquor. The former engrossed in their work, and the latter rushing on in eager anticipation of the delights of drink, hardly ever turn their heads to look at these birds. Even the little boys who were not mature enough for either of the above pursuits utterly disregard these birds and concentrate on catching crabs which they convert into cash.

Habituated to this inattention, the birds are perhaps more perplexed than annoyed when one aberrant specimen of the human species approaches, sits down, peers at them and scribbles away in a notebook. But they were very tolerant, and even seemed to be flattered by this unaccustomed attention.

The dominant species here are two - one which I have already described and with some diffidence called the '? Lesser Sandplover; and another, a perfect replica of this, but larger, that I named with greater diffidence '?Large Sandplover'. Numerous and tame, these two species would rest in mixed flocks, their little bodies pressed into the sand or resting on the masses of dry flotsam some yards away from the surf. If you happen to be passing by, they do not so much as move a feather. But take an interest in them, look directly at them or approach them closely, and they would with great reluctance rise, adopt a hunch-backed stance, take a few steps away from you and stand there looking over their shoulders, their white foreheads flashing in the bright sun. Walk closer still, and the whole sand will become alive with these birds as many whose presence you had not suspected will rise with great reluctance and slink off for a few feet only to freeze and look askance at you. Seldom would they fly off and it was often possible to shepherd a scattered flock into a tight bunch and drive them along the sand-bar without even a single bird taking to wing. I did this many a time during the three months I spent at Poovar. With such close acquaintance it is difficult to convince oneself that one's identification of these birds could be mistaken or at best only tentative.

A '?Lesser Sandplover' was limping on its left leg. He would lag behind when his kind were moving a pace faster. But even this lame individual would limp away when we tailed him rather than spread his perfectly sound wings and fly.

In these flocks there once appeared a bird very like them in size, shape and coloration, but with beautiful yellow legs. A Little Ring Plover had come visiting his cousins! A Grey Plover was always there, occasionally letting himself be surrounded by his Lilliputian cousins, but more often feeding alone. When the sand plovers swarmed around him, he would pretend that they just did not exist. Most of the time he simply stood somewhere with a rather melancholy look on his face. When he flew the black patch on his arm-pit gave one assurance of his identity. So did the fluty pleu-pleeu note, feeble and plaintive. Terns and gulls did visit the beach occasionally, but naming them was never easy.

A grey Reef Heron was seen frequently at the river mouth. While feeding, now and then it would spread out its wings fanwise and feed inside this umbrella of feathers. I understand that this enables the bird to see its prey more easily by shutting out the glare of the sun.

By their feeding habits the small waders were plainly divided into two groups. One preferred to feed on dry ground and in loose, scattered flocks (e.g. the sand plovers), while the other was always at the water's edge and in tighter groups. The latter class included the

Sanderlings and another bird that could only have been the Dunlin, a bird so far not recorded in Kerala. Unfortunately our attempts to secure a specimen were not successful. We mean to try again the next season.

These birds keep very close to the edge of the sea and were never seen feeding on the bank of the river. For their noon siesta, however, they preferred the squelchy mud on the river margin. When feeding they appeared to dare the waves to touch their feet and were expert at avoiding the advancing wave in the nick of time. The moment the waves started receding they turned round and chased it. Their purpose wasn't play but fulfilling the business of life: they seemed to find most food where the waves had just been. Probing the moist squelchy sand with their beaks in great urgency, they kept pulling out a pink or reddish worm that looked like a thin centipede. Meanwhile the waves would return and the birds would run landwards very fast, their feet almost a blur. Tirelessly they would feed like this, chasing and dodging the surf and the ripples, for hours.

Sandpipers were represented by the Common Sandpiper, a few of which went about feeding unobtrusively except when two of them met. This would lead to a chase, the birds flying low over the water, their bow-shaped wings flicking stiffly.

The sea and the river by their endless churning of the sand had raised a small island in the estuary some 100 feet by 20 feet. To this sanctuary the waders resorted to spend the night. Flock after flock would wind up their day's hunting and, twisting and turning in perfect unison, fly to their sleeping quarters. Even when it was almost dark, one or two groups would still be feeding hurriedly. And it was also at dusk that the egrets came flying upstream, steadily in loose flocks. Night then takes over ~~and the beach becomes desolate.~~

Professor Neelakantan came to this place on a day-trip on the 19th of November. The place was packed with birds on that day. The whole shore was bubbling with activity. You did not know which bird to concentrate on. Still we were able to record the Sanderling in Kerala for the second time and in considerable strength on that day (see Newsletter, Vol.18, No.12, Dec. 1978).

During my 3-month stay at Poovar I made friends with some fishermen and asked them to bring me any dead birds that they might come across in the course of their work. One of them presented me with a strange-looking tern, all black above, pure white below. No such tern was included in the 'Birds of Kerala'. So I took it to Prof. Neelakantan who identified it as a juvenile Brownwinged Tern. Measurement suggested that it wasn't one of the races so far recorded from the Indian coasts. So the skin went to the Bombay Natural History Society. The

Experts there confirmed the species identification, but we are left in doubt regarding the subspecies. The discovery by Sri Sureshkumar of a headless specimen rotting amidst the littoral rubbish did not throw any more light on the question of the subspecies.

The same fisherman got me an enfeebled Slaty-legged Banded Crane which soon died. I wondered how the man had secured such a confirmed skulker. The fisherman said that he had rescued it from a small boy who was playing with it with a string tied to its leg.

During this season Prof. Neelakantan and I also visited the Kovalam beach. At one place we came across 15 Turnstones (see Newsletter, Dec. 1978). Whimbrels were also present. But Kovalam has become too crowded to suit the tastes of most of our migrant waders.

Veli, where a lake empties its surplus water into the sea, has also a sand-bar. Here some years ago we had seen the Osprey. Whimbrel, a flock of Little Terns, Sandplovers etc. But in 78-79 only a few Sandplovers were seen here. Most of the vegetation - pandanus thickets and some mangroves - has been cleared and the place has a bleak and barren look now. Moreover the sea here is the colour of strong tea and the sands have turned orange because of the chemical pollution resulting from the release of effluents from the Titanium Factory close by. Only the large yellow crabs seem not to mind the change in colour or composition of the water and the sand. The fishermen say that no fish ever comes within miles of this beach now.

Perumathura, some 30 km north of Trivandrum, is as unspoilt as Poovar. Here, at a place called Muthalappoozhi, the sea and the backwaters meet. For some months a sand-bar obstructs this, but this year no sand-bar was formed it seems. A narrow channel separates Perumathura from Anjango, from where pioneering ornithologists sent misleadingly labelled specimens to Britain. Prof. Neelakantan, Sri Suresh and I went to this place on 11.ii.79 expecting to meet with the same birds that we had seen of Turnstones and a Grey Plover all bearing vestiges of their summer plumage, on 6.x.1973. But we were in for a pleasant surprise.

The first birds to be noted were Sandplovers and Sanderlings. They were in some strength. Across the channel we saw what seemed to be a gull. But the binoculars revealed that it was a black and white bird sitting on its tarsi, that part of the leg from what we call the knee to the ankle. The bird had a thick, pointed black bill, and its legs were a beautiful pale blue. When it stood up, it looked like a miniature ostrich although the head reminded us of that of the Stone Plover without the curious markings of the Goggle-eyed bird. It was, of course, a Crab Plover, another first record for Kerala. The single specimen we saw, a juvenile, appeared to have had a surfeit of crabs for it never took even a flicker of interest in the hundreds of crabs that ran about all over the place. One or two crabs, we thought, even got near enough to nibble the feet of their foe! The bird was surprisingly tame and Sri Suresh was able to take quite a few photographs.

Sanderlings and 'Dunlin' were there in flocks. One of the curious things we noticed was that the Sanderling's black shoulder-patch had a knack of disappearing from time to time. When the birds bathed, an activity which they seemed to indulge in too often, the shoulder patch would stand out strikingly. But when the birds left the water and shook themselves, the patch went into hiding. It looked as if the birds were able to tuck in the black patch and bring it out at will.

Limping along in the rear of a flock of Sand Plovers was a bird with the left leg dangling uselessly - exactly as was the case with the lame Sand Plover I had come to know well when at Poovar. It pleased me to think that my lame friend had no difficulty at all in flying with the rest from Poovar to Perumathura, a distance of 40 miles or more. Only ringing it could have told me whether it was in fact the same handicapped individual. Even otherwise regular ringing is bound to tell us much about the local movements of these birds. It would be a fascinating and highly rewarding thing to do.

On 18.ii.1979 Sri Sureshkumar met with a few Blackwinged Stilts on the edge of the Vellayini Lake near Trivandrum. That was yet another addition to the Kerala list.

We visited Poovar for the last time this season on 18.iii.79 in the hope that some of the birds at least would have started assuming their breeding dress. We were not disappointed. Some of the Lesser Sand Plovers had a distinct chestnut tinge on the forehead. We suspect that they were really Kentish Plovers! On the same day we were fortunate enough to get a good look at that rather rare bittern, the Yellow Bittern. It was stalking through the thick reed bed beside the river on a small island.

On the whole birding this season was remarkably fruitful. Three new birds were added to the Kerala list: the Brownwinged Tern, the Crab Plover and the Stilt; we established that the Sanderling is quite common at least in some places on our coast; and we met with what we believe to have been the Dunlin. More than all this we discovered the deficiencies in our knowledge of these birds, and also that even the most recent Field Guides are of little use when you need some sure clue to the identity of many of our shore-birds in their drab winter plumage. A Field Guide solely for waders with the accent on the field marks of winter birds is long overdue. Unlike the Warblers which 'Chuck-Chuck' away in the mysterious depths of the undergrowth, these waders present no problems if you want to watch them. They are all yours. Out in the sun on the beach there is nothing but the glare to interfere with your vision. All you need is a good illustrated guide showing the birds as we see them, and not in their breeding plumage.

Another interesting exercise would be to man all our river mouths and secluded beaches. It is here that the waders congregate. But at present this seems to be mere wishful thinking, for how many bird-watchers are there in this excellent bird-country? At least a weekly trip to these places by the local birdwatcher is sure to add some more species to the State list and much other information of value.

Meanwhile we are eagerly awaiting the next season's visitors in the hope that the lessons we have learned in 78-79 will make it easier to recognise them and help to answer some of the numerous questions that simply refuse to lie down at the back of one's mind.

The Breeding of the Indian Koel (*Eudynamys scolopacea*) by K.K. Neelakantan

It is really surprising that in the ten issues of the Newsletter since the announcement of the Madhav Gadgil Prize (Vol.XIX No.1 p.9) no one appears to have given a thought to the subject. This may be because most of us tend to take the crows, the sparrows and the Blue Rock Pigeon for granted. We (at any rate I) seem to think it not worth while making a note when their nests are seen or other activities noticed. I have been going through my bird diaries (1943 to 1979 in 72 thick notebooks) and extracting every breeding record found in them. I was shocked by the paucity of my notes on the nesting of the two crows. While I have carefully recorded every nest of the Little Ringed Plover, the Redwattled Lapwing and even the Redwhiskered Bulbul for instance, I haven't cared to make a note of when the Koel begins to sing each year or when it is last heard singing.

From the comparatively few records I have unearthed, I am able to do no more than suggest that in Kerala 1. the Koel begins to sing in November (but it did not do so this November!), 2. is most vociferous in January, 3. continues to sing till May, 4. juveniles accompanying House Crows are seen mostly in June, July and August, 5. but there are a few records for February, March, September, October, and even November, 6. although the ku-vvoo ku-vvoo song apparently begins to be heard only in December, males may be seen displaying and heard uttering loud bubbling calls in November.

This year a number of House Crow nests were found completed in the first week of November. Brooding was noted in mid-November. But till today (5-12-79) no Koel has been heard singing. Does this mean that these 'early nesters' have a better chance of escape from the parasite? Do some koels mate even before the males begin singing? In Trivandrum the Jungle Crow is seldom (if ever) seen fostering a koel chick. Is this because there are more than enough House Crows to meet the requirements of the local koels?

Editors Note

I wish I was as conscientious a note taker as Prof. K.K. Neelakantan. There are many Koels in our garden - over half a dozen. They are very fond of the Singapore Cherry tree and love its berries. I found a young bird sometime ago struggling desperately in a water tank. I rescued it and after the wings had dried I flung it in the air and to my delight it managed to fly away. There was much noisy activity among the other Koels when the young bird rejoined its companions. It is my belief that the Koels here in Bangalore continue calling in some fashion or other throughout the year, unlike in Bombay where their calling is far more regulated by the seasons. These however are only vague impressions and I hereby resolve to keep more careful notes of the Koel during 1980, and be a contender for the Madhav Gadgil prize which is carried over to the next year.

Incidentally, may I, at this somewhat inappropriate place, wish all our readers a very happy New Year?

Floods in Ranganthittu Bird Sanctuary by S.G. Neelihal

Ranganthittu, the queen amongst bird sanctuaries in India, is now haunted by over a lakh of tourists every year. Four species of Egrets, three species of Cormorants, Darter, Pond Heron, Night Heron, Spoon-bill, White Ibis, Openbilled Stork, and Eastern Purple Heron breed here on the vegetation of the islets surrounded by the deep and swift flowing waters of the Cauvery river.

For six years I have seen floods at Ranganthittu, but I was present only after the floods came and never at the time of their commencement. Ranganthittu receives only about 25 inches of rainfall. Yet the heavy precipitation upstream in the Kodagu District a 100 kms. away, frightens the PWD authorities of the nearby Krishnarajasagar Dam, and this leads them to release waters into the Cauvery river. My repeated requests to the PWD not to wait for the KRS reservoir to fill up to the brink, and suddenly release the water into the river without prior notice has met with no response. When I telephoned to them once the Assistant Engineer said "Build your nests at a higher level." Though it may seem incredible these members of the PWD apparently thought that the nests were built by me, and not by the birds.

On 26th July 1977 while I was in my wildlife office at Mysore, the telephone rang at 3 p.m. and the Engineer-in-Charge of the KRS dam informed me that he was releasing 10,000 cusecs of water that very day at 5 p.m., and that I should take the necessary precautions. What precautions could I possibly take except to stop boating down stream of Ranganthittu and to warn the tourists about the imminent rise in the level of the river? I rushed to Ranganthittu to do what I could.

When I arrived there I found that the river was flowing normally and the banks were teeming with tourists. The breeding birds were busy in and around their nests. This was the peak season and most of them were incubating and many had chicks. I rowed round the nesting islands apprehensive of the disaster that was to follow, though the birds were quite unaware of the impending doom.

I returned to the Bank at 4 p.m. Just then in the crowd I spotted our Editor and his wife. I took them for one more round in the boat and we managed to see a huge marsh crocodile (*Crocodilus palustris*) sunning on an exposed sheet rock in the middle of the river. Normally, crocodiles slide into the water and disappear on seeing or smelling men coming towards them. But this one appeared to be an exception. The crocodile was so close that it filled my 200mm tele-lens to the full extent of the frame. We returned to the bank and after seeing off the Editor and warning away the tourists I again ventured for a third round in the river to study birds. It was now 5 p.m. but there was no sign of the flood.

I went round in the boat and had anchored it near the main islet to have a close look at the breeding birds. Just then the boatman abruptly pulled me to say that the river had started swelling. I hurried to reach the bank and by then the river had already risen by one meter. 10,000 cusecs of water had commenced gushing down the river. It was a terrible scene; the river went on rising, and uprooted trees, brushwood, and snakes were speeding along in the current. A portion of the islet was also washed away.

I watched the birds on the islets through the binoculars and the view was heart rending. The rising waters submerged all the low built nests containing eggs, hatchlings, and nestlings. The parents who had lost their nests were in deep agitation. The median egrets, the cattle egrets, the pond herons which had their nests on the lower levels of the vegetation abandoned the trees. But the little egrets and the night herons did not quit their posts so readily. They stuck to their submerging nests and sat firmly on them until the nests were actually washed away. Just then in the current of the swollen river a bundle of green climbers came drifting down. To my surprise a little egret came flying and landed on this vast moving clump of climbers and floated down on it for some time. It then started to collect some nesting material. It seemed incredible that even in this confusion the nesting instinct predominated.

It seems to me that the night herons are the worst sufferers on account of these floods as they occupied the lower levels of the vegetation. As the river swelled the unfortunate night herons became panicky and started calling in their usual raucous manner. I was truly flabbergasted to see that many of these night herons sat grimly on their nests and abandoned them only when the nests dissolved in the water. I stood spellbound and could hardly believe my eyes.

Lorikeets on Loranthus by R. Sugathan

It is an established fact that the tree parasite Loranthus is strictly a bird pollinated flower (The main agent of this process are sunbirds and spider hunters). When they hunt for flower nectar on the Loranthus plants they exert pressure at the tip of the flowers (a green cap like portion). If the flowers are mature they break open, making it possible for the sunbird or spider hunter to put its long bill inside the corolla tube to suck the nectar using their tubular tongue. During this process the pollen from the ripe anthers adheres to the forehead feathers of the bird. When the process is repeated in other flowers pollen dust on the feathers comes in contact with the ripe stigma of the flower resulting in the pollination of the flower.

Flowerpeckers are very fond of Loranthus berries. They were seen swallowing these berries. Being small birds, flowerpeckers can accommodate only a very few berries in their intestine. As a result of this they start dropping them one after another within a short time as the excreta. Loranthus seeds have a sticky seed covering under the skin of the berries. When they pass through the intestine of the bird the outer skin gets separated from the slimy sticky seed. The excreted seeds adhere to the branches of the trees on which they sit. The seeds sprout within a few days time and the parasite spreads widely.

During the Frogmouth Survey in Parambikulam Wildlife Sanctuary in Kerala, I came across some raw Loranthus seeds on one of the Sanctuary roads under a Loranthus clump on a Teak tree. This induced me to look closely into the subject. There were no birds at that time on the Loranthus plant but by the time I collected the fallen seeds and started examining them I found that seven birds had landed on the Loranthus plant on the Teak Tree. Through my field glasses I could identify them as Lorikeets (*Loriculus vernalis*). They started working on the raw seeds and the tender leaves on the Loranthus. Within about 9 minutes they had dropped about 19 seeds and 7 leaves. Most of the seeds were broken into pieces. The leaves too were cut by their bills. Then they shifted to the next bush and in a few minutes they had worked on the 5 Loranthus bushes on the tree before moving to the next tree.

As far as I know there has been no record about Lorikeets visiting Loranthus plants. Next day around 10-15 a.m. I visited the place again. Till 10.50 no bird came to the tree except for a few purple and purple-rumped sunbirds. No seeds were dropped on the ground. However a little after 10.50 a.m. 7 Lorikeets (presumably the same batch which I had seen the day before) visited the bush. Within 5 minutes they dropped 9 seeds on the ground and flew away.

From these observations it is evident that Lorikeets visit Loranthus regularly. I have not noticed anything similar in the Nilgiris. This could be because Lorikeets move about a great deal locally and their movement may perhaps not coincide with the flowering of Loranthus

plants in particular areas.

I would like to invite comments from other readers on this subject.

International Symposium on Bustards

An International Symposium on Bustards will take place in January on 1st, 2nd and 3rd of 1980. Enquiries may be addressed to Mr. Harsh Vardhan, Gen. Secretary, TWAI, at: C-158 A, Dayanand Marg, Tilak Nagar, Jaipur (India).

Birds in our Garden by ZF

There has been a marked improvement in bird life in the past few months largely I suppose because of the excess rains in this corner of India (4.2" instead of the average 32"). Trees have grown rapidly this season. This morning I saw Purplerumped and Purple Sunbirds and a Loten's Sunbird, Grey Tits, Redvented Bulbuls, Koels, Spotted Doves, Ioras, Blyth Reed Warblers, Common Bee-eaters, Common Swallows and several others. The Ioras had come to a corner of the garden where they have never been seen before, perhaps because the tree cover here is better now. Am I right in thinking that though the Purplerumped Sunbirds always move about in pairs, the Purple Sunbirds are less devoted to each others. Ignoring the anthromorphism it would be useful if readers sent in their observations about the strength or weakness of the pair bond in different species of birds. A flock of Whiteheaded ~~Babbler~~ have established themselves in our garden. Tailor birds find the Holmskoldia bushes satisfactory micro habitats. In the past few days Spotted Owlets have been completely silent. A Blackwinged Kite and a Shikra constitute the birds of prey. The pair of Grey Partridges refuse to multiply. The drumming of Rain Quail is frequently heard. A Pond Heron has become fond of our pond and is around a great deal. Whitebreasted Kingfishers too seem to get their sustenance from our frog infested pond. A Blue Jay chuckles and frolicks in characteristic fashion. Yellow-wattled Lapwings scream from time to time and attack any suspected enemy. A male and female Black Red Start have arrived, but they are never seen together. Intimacy presumably is reserved for their home territory. As I mentioned in an earlier article we have "lost" the Pied Bushchat and Blackbellied Finch-Larks because our garden has lost the open character which it had when we came 5 years ago. This is of course only a list of our of our more prominent garden birds. Incidentally the Loten's Sunbird referred to above looked very much like a Little Spider Hunter (Arachnothera longirostris). But the Handbook (Vol.X page 52) restricts the distribution to the Western Ghats. So perhaps it could only be a Loten's Sunbird.

REVIEW

Bird Behaviour by John Sparks. Illustrated by David Andrews (Hamlyn All-Colour Paperbacks 155pp 95p)

The author of this well-organized little book is an expert on animal behaviour, and has worked for 3 years in the ethology laboratories of London Zoo, specializing in monkey and bird behaviour.

Being a producer of natural history programmes for TV and radio, he is also a ~~master~~ of the techniques of communicating complex information in clear visual terms. This book does not pretend to be for the laymen; but for the amateur birdwatcher it will build up his self-confidence by giving precise, accurate and up-to-the minute information about cloudy areas like migration, territory, breeding - in fact, about all facets of bird behaviour. We all know that an increasing number of sophisticated studies are now being undertaken on every aspect of bird ethology. But unless we read every scientific journal we seldom discover their total results, nor can we always fit them into the exact position on the overall map of our personal observations and beliefs. Dr. Sparks does this for us. He draws for us an accurate map in correct perspective, incorporating all the latest boundary changes and discarding the areas of unfounded theories and unproved facts. Without going into unnecessary details we are given a steel frame of scientific descriptions and explanations of bird behaviour. Once acquired, this framework should help every birdwatcher to analyse and interpret a great many bird movements which so far seemed meaningless; conversely it will also help us not to over-interpret or anthropomorphize what we think we have seen. This succinct codification, which sorts out knowledge from assumption, and conjecture from proof, is bound to be useful for all practising birders in every part of the world.

"The quaint rituals of birds," says the author "often take place in the seclusion of foliage or in circumstances when privacy is guaranteed; the majority of bird watchers rarely have either the time or inclination really to watch their quarry, and more often than not succeed in making them nervous and anxious. And yet it is precisely the elaborate behaviour of birds in action, whether preening or courting, that makes them so fascinating.... This book attempts to expose something of the private life and world of these creatures in reasonably straightforward terms."

In producing this book, the illustrator has worked and thought almost as hard as the author himself. Every page is ablaze with coloured bird pictures, not for mere identification, but illustrating postures, attitudes, and principles. David Andrews has done a splendid job of graphically conveying the implications of bird movements so that even the meanest intellect cannot fail to grasp them. We can now subscribe to G.K. Chesterton's advice to children, "Don't believe in anything/that can't be told in coloured pictures". And through these coloured pictures all of us can now become well-informed.

L.F.

Correspondence

Lapwing fighting off Cobra by S. Rangaswami

Perhaps the Redwattled Lapwing will be yielding place to some other bird for the honour of appearing on the cover page of our Newsletter. Even otherwise, I wish to pay my tributes to this bird for its innate boldness.

On 21-10-79 I had taken some youngsters to do a bit of watching in Taramani area - a place close to Adyar in Madras. We chose this area because we have been seeing a lot of partridges, doves and yellow-wattled lapwings in the Campus of the Medical Research Institute there - a virtually uninhabited place covering an area of several hundred acres. On this day we were fortunate to observe from a distance of about 100 metres four or five very young ones of an yellow-wattled lapwing boldly venturing out to fend for themselves. Suddenly we saw a pair of red-wattled lapwings appearing from nowhere, shrieking frenziedly and we saw them diving repeatedly attacking something on the ground. As we watched the ground carefully through our powerful field glasses we saw a huge cobra, not less than 6 feet in length, trying to get at one of the fledgelings of the yellow-wattled lapwing. The 'dive bombing' attacks of the two red-wattled lapwings were so persistent, that the cobra glided away in panic. The serpent was chased away for a distance of nearly 50 metres. All our young bird watchers were filled with awe on seeing the boldness of the two red-wattled lapwings and till we reached home they were imitating their 'pity-to-do-it' calls and were speaking admiringly of their display of conspicuous courage.

Saving our Pheasants (Courtesy, The Times of India, 23-11-1979)

Ornithologists and bird lovers from various parts of the world have gathered in Kathmandu to discuss the threatened future of various varieties of pheasant in Asia. They seem agreed that the excessive pace of forest exploitation and destruction creates the "single most serious worldwide environmental problem" for the survival of the species.

In Nepal, the national bird is "Danfe", a resplendent pheasant variety threatened by ecological changes in the Himalayas.

The Prime Minister, Mr. Surya Bahadur Thapa, who inaugurated the first world symposium on pheasants, and King Birendra, who sent a message to the two-day gathering, hoped that measures suggested by the experts would help achieve harmony and peaceful co-existence between the world's fauna and flora.

Experts from Pakistan, India, Nepal, Japan, New Zealand, Malaysia and the UK are here to compare notes on the techniques evolved in different countries to protect the threatened species and examine whether any standardisation is possible.

Mr. Karna Sakya, secretary of the Nepal chapter of the World Pheasant Association, said that in Nepal most of the pheasant habitats in the Himalayan foothills had been encroached upon by extensive low-yield agriculture and that low-living standards tempted villagers to poach on pheasants.

Dr. A.J. Gaston, Canadian expert on Himalayan birds, said "The economic pressure on land and forests is very strong in India and so the factors like grazing and felling. Suitable reserves could be created to protect pheasants."

Pakistan's wild life administrator, Mr. Z.B. Miraz, said five-species of pheasants found in his country had declined owing to human encroachment on their habitat and even killings except in the occupied area of Kashmir.

Dr. Christopher Savage, director for conservation in the World Pheasant Association, said that at the present rate, all tropical forests in Asia would vanish in 85 years.

He said the conference intended to identify the gaps in knowledge and techniques, especially in the Asian context, and examine the scope for standardisation of measures for preservation with lists of priorities.

Mid Air Piracy by Jungle Crow. by Subramanya.S.

I happened to be in Andhra Pradesh Agricultural University campus from 22nd May 1979 to 5th June 1979. It was on one of my usual bird-watching stroll, with Mr. Sri Kumar Chattopadhyaya of Zoological Survey of India, Calcutta, that I saw something which to me seemed quite unusual.

It was a Blackwinged Kite (*Elanus caeruleus*) with a prey in its legs, being attacked by a Jungle Crow (*Corvus macrorhynchos*) in the mid air. We stopped to observe the proceedings as the crow continued its swooping dives at the Kite. Observing for sometime, I could make out that the crow was more interested in the prey in the talons of the Kite, which it successfully managed to snatch using its legs and not its beak as I thought it would be.

Flying a considerable distance away from us and the Kite, it started meddling with the trophy while in flight with its beak, typical of the common Kites and Harriers. The identity of the prey was not possible as the distance was beyond the scope of our binocles.

Though many times I have seen crows attacking Owls, Pariah Kites, Shikras etc., I have never encountered anything like this. I would be interested in reports of similar instances from the readers.

What bird is this? by Sumant R. Shah

I saw a bird in the Kedarnath Region at an altitude 1750m at Somprayag on and I would be grateful if any reader can help me with identification.

I saw it on a perpendicular rockwall near a river on 19-10-79 at 10 a.m.

The size was about that of a Spotted Dove. For a moment I thought it could be a Woodpecker though I saw no red spots on the crown or neck.

It had a long pointed bill similar to a great Stone Plover. The breast and the throat were white like a Kingfisher's. The back was greyish white. The tail portion of the back was dark grey and the under parts were grey. It was extremely active, hopping all the time opening its wings slightly. During a short flight I could see that its flanks were deep scarlet red. This was its most outstanding feature. It scanned all the ~~rocks & crevices~~ of the rockwall in search of insects and did not stop even for a second. Once it flew for about 10 feet and the wing spread while flying appeared to be like that of a hoopoe. The rockwall was dusty without any vegetation what so ever.

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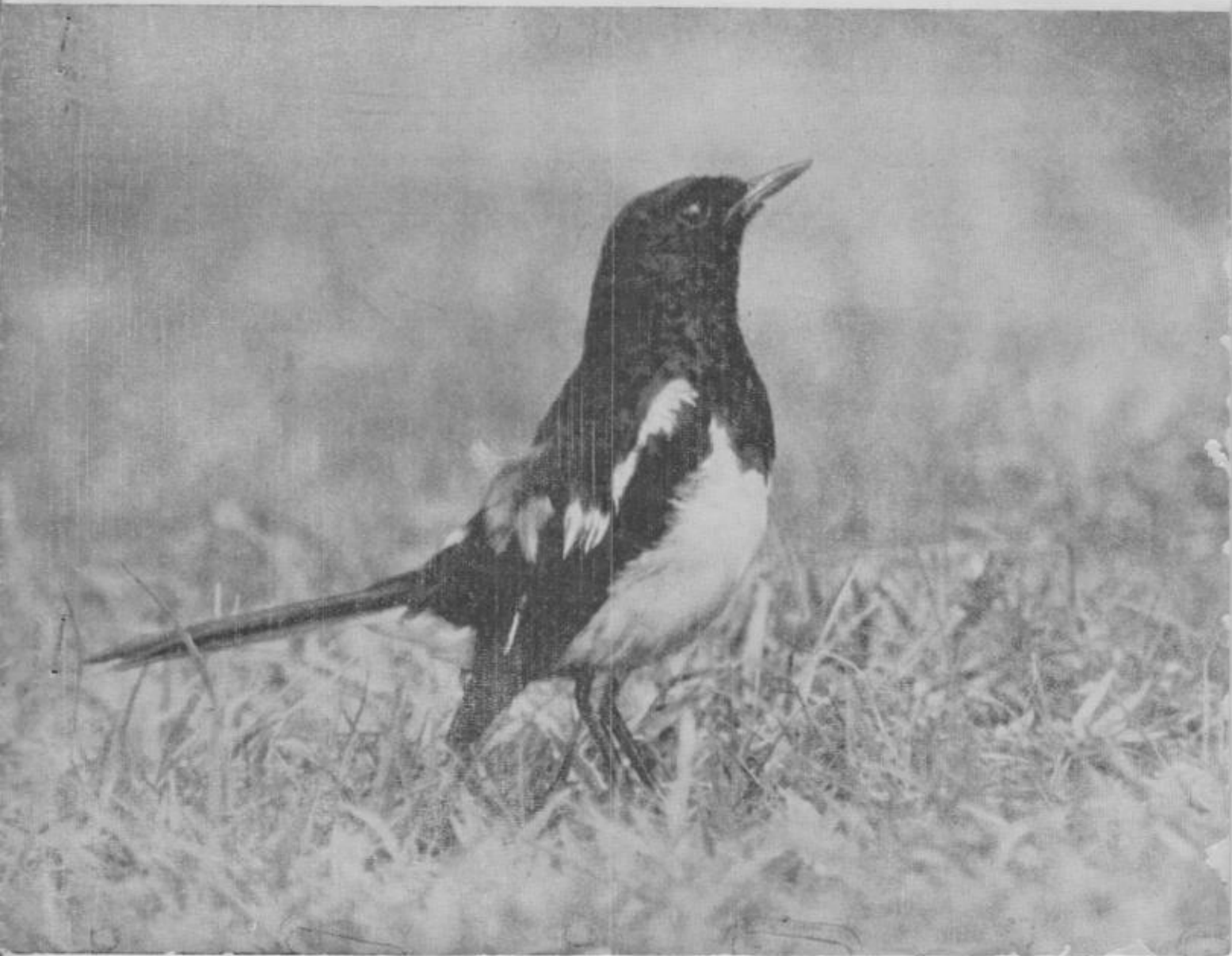
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Cover Picture: Male Pied Bushchat (*Saxicola caprata*)

Photo by: Vijayakumaran Nair

Newsletter for Birdwatchers

VOL. XX NO. 2 FEBRUARY, 1980



NEWSLETTER

FOR BIRDPWATCHERS

Vol. XX No.2

February 1980

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Our Contributors

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Birds in Meerut which are absent in Delhi by Y.M. Rai

Sudhir Vyas Newsletter Vol.XIX No.11 reveals the existence of the striated warbler (*Megalurus palustris*) in Delhi area which was never before mentioned by any naturalist. This discovery was long awaited for the marshland at Hastinapur near Meerut is veritably a home of striated warblers. I discovered this in 1978. Its song as spring approaches attracts the attention of a birdwatcher. The bird takes a short high flight, then sails to a high reed to perch and sing out its musical "question", rendered as "oh where are you going".

Besides this warbler there are a few birds notably present at Meerut but not so far reported from Delhi which is situated only 75 kms south-west of Meerut.

1. North Indian Crested Goshawk - (*Accipiter trivirgatus*). It arrives in early winter and stays throughout the cold months. It has been observed for long periods at Hastinapur in 1978 & 1979 and has also been sighted elsewhere in Meerut area. According to the Handbook it stays in the same jungle day after day.
2. Indian Brown Hawk Owl - (*Ninoxscutulata lugubris*). It was observed in forests at Hastinapur for long periods of several months and is most probably a resident bird. Reported to stay at the same post night after night.
3. The Jungle Myna - (*Acridotheres fuscus*). These mynas are fairly common on the verge of the forested area of Hastinapur during certain months, but are absent in some others. They appear to be local migrants.
4. Finn's Baya - (*Ploceus megarhynchus*). This baya is resident at Hastinapur and breeds in small colonies during the months of June and July.
5. Pigmy Woodpecker - (*Picoides nanus*). The birds were observed in 1978 from Feb. to April in Hastinapur forest.

The birds mentioned above have not been reported from Delhi until now, and if they are indeed absent, the reasons for their absence could be an interesting study.

Khandala Pond A Nursery Resort for Fresh Water Birds by Bro.A. Navarro,SJ

In continuation of my past observations at Khandala Pond I decided to keep a close watch on the bird population from end June to September. The pond was already overflowing in a couple of weeks after the start of the monsoon. Aquatic plants covered the whole surface of the pond with the exception of a few narrow strips of water left without vegetation, as if there were inner currents or deep channels at the bottom of the pond.

One day suddenly there appeared a small colony of Coots - twelve in all. A few days later a couple of Pheasant-tailed Jacanas made their appearance on the pond where the aquatic plants were in full bloom. There were more than twelve pairs of Indian Little Grebes. By the middle of September the pond presented the most fascinating sight you could have seen. Chicks of diverse sizes were on all sides of the pond. Such variations in size could only be the product of more than one brood. All adult birds were seen with a trail of four or three little chicks swimming about.

Once I saw four Coots in a row with a large gap between each Coot. I noticed that all four Coots were nursing four little black-coloured downy chicks.

The last three days of September I spent most of the time by the side of the pond with the sole purpose of observing the behaviour of the three varieties of water birds, breeding in the pond and at the same time to check on the number of chicks that each Coot was nursing. By sight, and with the help of binoculars I noticed that all the Coots were being followed by four little chicks only. As a result of this observation I consulted the "Handbook of the Birds of India and Pakistan", Vol. II, page 10, and found the number of Coots eggs in each clutch, varied from 5 to 10 or 6 to 10. Why then the abnormality in the Coot colony at Khandala pond? Can any reader suggest some reason?

There were a few Pheasant-tailed Jacanas which were difficult to locate in that large expanse of water covered with aquatic plants, and even more so since their body pattern and colouration blend so well with the environment. Only when they changed position did the white colour of their wings reveal where they were.

A couple of times I had a chance of seeing the male Jacana with three tiny chicks. I emphasize particularly the role of the male because the Jacana group by nature is polyandrous. Therefore, the males are responsible for the incubation of the eggs and the care of the little chicks.

The Indian Little Grebe were the only birds that could be seen often near the edge of the pond swimming up and down with a trail of three or four tiny little Grebes. All of a sudden the parent Grebe ducks into the water and at this instant, the little Grebes stopped and looked at each other wondering at the sudden disappearance of their parent. The reappearance of the parent Grebe on the surface made the little ones rush to their parents.

Redheaded Merlin (Falco chicquera) by S. Subramanya

Food Storage: On 20th Nov. 1979 evening I was at the 'would be' nesting site of the Redheaded Merlins (NLBW 19(11):12), watching the male and the female share a male sparrow (Passer domesticus) the last one of the day before roosting. At 5.30 p.m. after both birds left the nest-tree

I was filling in the last minute observations, and was almost through with it when I raised my head to find the male coming to the feeding perch on the tree with a female sparrow and started feeding on it.

The male fed on its kill with long pauses while it bowed occasionally, as if to push the food down its gullet. By 5.39 p.m. it had finished almost 2/3 of the prey and after a long rest it flew with the remains of the prey to a branch of a nearby dead tree. It perched on the cut end of the erect branch and took a long rest before deciding to feed again. It had three to four gulps of the torn flesh piece, bowing after swallowing each bit. It appeared as though the merlin was gulping beyond its stomach's capacity and the male left the site without devouring the prey completely.

Next morning I saw both the birds arrive at the nest site and share a female sparrow. After finishing the kill the male flew to the branch of the dead tree where it had left the remains of the kill of the previous day and fed on it four times taking only bits and did not feed again. * May be the flesh had gone stale.

I have read about crows, woodpeckers etc. storing food but not falcons. I would be very much interested if any of the readers have come across similar instances.

Pellet Casting: It was on November 1st, 1979. The hour long watch on merlins at their nest site (NLBW 19(11):12), seemed to be almost uneventful till 4-40 p.m., when the event that followed took me totally unawares.

The male which was calm and preening all the while seemed to stiffen suddenly, stand up erect on the perch, with its wings tightly pressed to the body and the neck stretched fully upwards. Before I could make any guess about this peculiar behaviour, it started to duck its head in quick jerks accompanied by violent side to side movement. It repeated the process twice again in rapid succession and ejected a pellet! After casting the pellet it stood motionless for few moments before resuming its preening.

It seemed that these downward movements would bring about proper muscular action, aiding in the passage of the pellet down the digestive tract.

I observed similar behaviour a couple of times again and it was interesting to note that in all such cases the pellets cast were bigger than normal ones.

All this jerking and movement - for a big pellet, Isn't it interesting?

Pellets as food: Redheaded Merlins have the habit of casting pellets at their nest site (NLBW 19(11):12). A keen eye can locate those around the base of the nesting tree.

During the past three weeks, the pellets which formerly used to be a small compact lump had their surface punctured with one or two crude holes. I did not pay much attention to this till I stumbled into something which I report.

On 30th November 1979, at about 3 p.m. I retrieved a pellet, almost fresh, probably cast a few hours ago. Shaking the pellet within my palm I strolled casually looking for more. Suddenly, I felt a strange sensation on my palm, and found a few small dull black ants (*Tapinoma melanocephala*). I dropped the pellet and knelt to watch the ants stream out through the hole.

When it appeared as if all the ants had abandoned the pellet, I split it open to find a few ants still concentrating around the inner core made of split bones. Probably, they were lured by the gastric exudates that helped to bind the undigested animal diet, while it was squeezed into a tight pellet. And also they may have a fancy for the animal matter, still adhering to the split bones.

A refuse of one organism is tasty snack for another. Such are the ways of nature.

Agility: On 8th December 1979 around 5 p.m. I watched a female merlin as she plucked the feathers off the body of a female sparrow (*Passer domesticus*), at the nesting site (MLBW 19(11):12) I settled down to watch her, as she would start to fill her belly soon.

Suddenly, as she turned the prey to pluck another side she lost her grip on it and the body of the prey true to the laws of gravity began its downward plunge.

Even before the idea of examining the prey blossomed in my mind, with the fear of losing the prized catch, the female with a sudden twist of her body dived down. However with rapid beat of wings she swooped on the falling booty, and extending her talons as she shot by, caught the prey even before the limp body had fallen 12 feet from the feeding perch, 70 feet above. Having the booty secure in her talons she made her way to the perch.

A Bird Sanctuary near Narora by Abdul Jamil Urfi

The natural flow of the river Ganges is interrupted by a dam built across it at Narora, fifty kilometers from Aligarh (in Western Uttar Pradesh). The area near the dam provides a good habitat for migrants from Siberia and Europe. There is luxuriant growth on the banks of the river where birds and animals find protection from rough weather. Fortunately the locals condemn shooting due to religious and cultural reasons. Therefore that stretch of land on the banks of the Ganges from Rajkot to Narora is virtually a sanctuary for birds.

I discovered this while visiting the place with Asad Rafi Rehman, the Secretary of our Nature Conservation Society in Aligarh. We spotted 'Surkhabs' (Brahminy Duck or Ruddy Sheldrake) resting on small islands. We saw a huge flocks of Wigeons numbering several hundred and with them were a few tufted pochards. The latter were close to the dam and we saw that they could dive as well as Cormorants can.

Our 7 km trek made us go through marshes, sandy shores and thick reed jungles. I gathered that Nilgais were present in small numbers in this locality. Once they were plenty but due to indiscriminate hunting they have been brought to the verge of extinction (Editorial Query: If the people do not hunt birds for religious reasons why are they hunting Nilgai? Or were the nilgai shot by sportsmen from outside?). While walking through the reeds we took the path made by Nilgais and at one point we found some hoof marks of these animals.

We saw many pairs of collared bushchats, spurwinged plovers, and several species of wagtails. We heard the high-pitched calls of Sarus Cranes and in the marshes we found purple moorhens, coots, gray herons, black-winged stilts, sandpipers, and redshanks.

From an elevated spot we could see the colossal force of the river, and we saw that in the middle there was a small island literally covered with birds. We saw curlews and spoonbills and also a large flock of Indian Skimmers. Our notes indicate that we saw 30 species on that day including the streaked babbler (*Napothera brevicaudata*).

The Colorado Field Ornithologists' Quarterly

This Journal published 4 times a year is sent in exchange of our Newsletter. Volume 13, Number 2 of Spring 1979 has just been received. If members are interested in having a look at this issue and some of the previous one's the Editor will be glad to send ~~them~~ on to them.

This group indulges in continuous and serious birdwatching. The Spring 1979 issue contains articles on Breeding Shorebirds in the Arkansas Valley, Raptor Food Habits in the Oil Shale Regions of Northwestern Colorado, Spring Migration, 1978 and several more. Though the bird life of Colorado is very different to that of India, the scientific studies which they pursue may give us ideas for similar research in India.

Z.F.

Editorial Note

Being now in the fortunate position of receiving a fairly steady stream of interesting notes I will have to follow the policy of referring briefly to the central point made by the authors and not publish their notes in full. This will at least ensure that the notes are not held up endlessly in my tray because of lack of space.

House Crow

T.V. Jose writes to say that while strolling on the sea shore near Nariman Point he saw 9 common house crows chasing a member of their species with some determination. The bird being chased obviously had a choice morsel of food in its beak. However, when the leading crow returned to base everyone including himself lost all interest in the morsel in its beak. Jose ultimately found that it was just a piece of coconut husk. Obviously crows do indulge in fun and games.

Rufousbacked Shrike

Manjit Singh Dhindsa and P.S. Sandhu write to say that they saw a rufousbacked shrike striking a sparrow which was caught in a mist net. They write that it is known that this bird feeds on earthworms, insects, fish, frog, lizards, fledglings, and sickly or disabled birds. This observation may be interesting for the readers.

Kentish Plover

Ananta Mitra refers to a Kentish Plover which he observed on the coast of Orissa "A particular behaviour of the bird drew my attention. When looking ahead it was occasionally bobbing its head and at times was tilting the head on one side. It seems that this bird has developed a technique to ascertain parallax between the two places of its binocular vision and secondly by tilting the head it finds out in respect to the object the parallax between two lines of its monocular vision of that side of the head". Mitra suggests that this behaviour may help the bird to measure the distance accurately from an object as the sharpness of the angles vary with the distance.

The Amateur Birdwatching Association

The Amateur Birdwatching Association, 7 Lakshmiiah Road, Bangalore 560 008, have been doing serious birdwatching for some years now. A list of the subjects they have been studying makes impressive reading. For example, Urbanisation and Bird Life, Avifauna of Lalbagh, Nidification of the Ashy wren Warbler, Ecology of the Indian Coot, Seasonal Variation of the Aquatic Birds of Bangalore, Studies on the Bird Pests of Wheat, and many more. They have member representatives in many cities including Calcutta

Delhi, Madras, Trivandrum, and we wish them all success. The notes on the Redheaded Merlin in this issue have been written by one of their members.

Correspondence

Comments by Lavkumar Khacher

I notice my good friend Himmatsinhji from Kutch wishes to generate a "quarrel" for everybody's fun: reference his Comments on page 9 of the November 1979 issue. On the auto-eroticism of parakeets and budgeries, I might recommend that readers get for themselves African Genesis by Robert Ardrey (published by William Collins and Sons) a lot of human failing - auto-eroticism included I should guess - and human qualities are shared by other forms of life including birds. On page 3 of the same issue of the Newsletter "the coronation pillow" is perhaps pillar. Can't imagine a pillow lying around from 1971 Durbar fame, though 1971 seems wrong too as we had no coronation durbars, they were dead by then as effectively as the Cheeta!

Had it not been for the observer being Prakash, Orioles fishing would seem the daftest thing to talk about (December issue page 7) but knowing Prakash, if the Oriole caught a fish, it did precisely that. I would suggest Prakash write a note for the Journal of BNHS please.

And Rekha Shukla, if other birds have eggs, you might transfer the eggs, but the chicks would not be adopted. Tern chicks, however and for that matter those of Blackwinged Stilts can swim well, and if the water rises slowly, the parents would lead them away. Parents would certainly not go for eggs placed elsewhere.

I'll end with a reference to the January 1980 issue. If anything, S.R. Shah's problem bird (page 15) should be a wall creeper but the size and the stone plover-like bill are confusing. Incidentally, the crimson is on the shoulders of the wings and not the flanks. This feature with the hoopoe-like flight and active foraging on steep rock faces points to this high altitude species which comes down to plains-level in winter. Wall creepers have been reported as being regular winter visitors on the Kutub Minar and the Secretariat building in New Delhi.

(Editorial Note: Brother A. Navarro, S.J. says that in his opinion the bird is the Wall Creeper (*Turdodroma muraria*))

Birdwatching at Ahmedabad by S.R. Shah

18 miles from Ahmedabad along the "Vadsar" road is a mini Keoladev Ghana minus the trees and nests. All the water birds were there except flamingoes and Siberian cranes. There were twenty pelicans. On 20-1-1980 I felt it to be a better place for birdwatching than "Nal Sarovar" which

is plagued by noisy picknickers from Ahmedabad. This "Thor" village lake has a water expanse of more than ten square miles. It is little known (it was recommended by Drongo Nature Club). It is not fed by any bus transport and is practically free from human interference whether fisherman or poachers. A special advantage is that several tar roads finger out and at the end of each is an abandoned and closed oil and natural gas well allowing a good view of birds in marshes channels and fields. Though I could see very few painted storks, I have a feeling that a large number of Bharatpur migrants have opted for this vast tranquil lake due to drought conditions at Bharatpur.

At Shilaj village about 10 miles from Ahmedabad were two score blackwinged stilts, a solitary spoonbill, a large egret, ringed plovers, stints and pond herons.

There were three scavenger vultures and it was curious that one mounted the other without any preliminary courtship formalities. The third one possibly excited by seeing his companions jumped over the two. I wonder if this is the normal behaviour among these birds.

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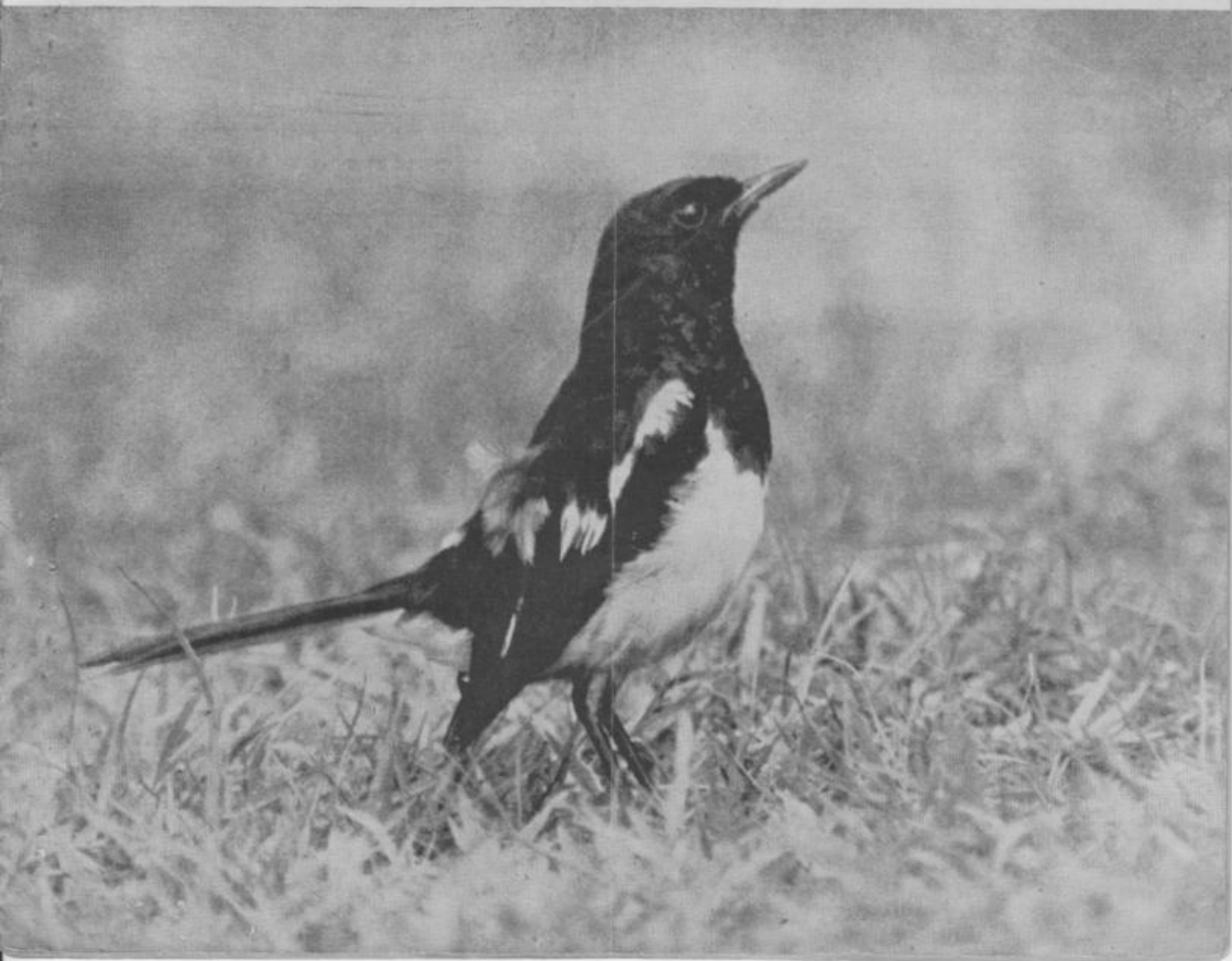
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Cover Picture: Male Pied Bushchat (*Saxicola caprata*)

Photo by: Vijayakumaran Nair

Newsletter for Birdwatchers

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NEWSLETTER FOR
BIRDPWATCHERS

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A Quick Visit to West Africa by Aamir Ali

Going to a new region is always good fun. Even the commonest birds are different and there is the excitement of seeing, and trying to identify, brand new species.

When I knew that I would be going to Yamassoukro, I wasn't very sure where this was, or even quite what it was. It turned out to be a brand new city, planned from scratch, in the centre of the Ivory Coast. It is the home village of the distinguished and long-lasting president of the country, Houphouët-Boigny. It is now being turned into the second city of the country, with wide avenues, magnificent buildings, a presidential palace, a golf club (of course), a boarding school with marble halls and air conditioning, first class hotels, and so on. The city is being carved out of tropical forest and it is sad to see splendid trees being bulldozed to make way for buildings, however elegant.

I asked my son who is in university in England to send me a copy of the Field Guide to the Birds of West Africa by Messrs. Serie, Morel and Hartwig (another example of Anglo-French co-operation). It is in the form which seems now to have become standard and was invaluable.

I had two early morning strolls in the extensive grounds of the Hotel President in Yamassoukro, an afternoon's outing in the surroundings, and the drive back to Abidjan, about 250 km, as opportunities for bird-watching.

It was strange to be in a country where there were no house sparrows or house crows. The common sparrow was the greyheaded (Passer griseus) and the crow was the pied crow (Corvus alba). I had first seen this black and white crow in Ethiopia and wondered at the elegance acquired by this corvus through the simple device of introducing some white into its colour scheme. They were common, perhaps they were all over Africa. One wonders what happens to them in South Africa - the mixture of black and white must surely contravene some racial law.

There were a great many sunbirds in the hotel grounds, mostly on bushes with an attractive pink and white flower. I didn't think sunbirds would be difficult to identify but I changed my mind; they almost achieved the warbler category. I concluded that while most of them were Olive-Bellied, there were some Yellow-Bellied as well. (Nectarinia chloropygia and N. venusta). Could this be? In any case, it was a delight to see the bright metallic blue and green flitting through the branches, or occasionally, flycatcher-like, making sallies after insects on the wing.

A very common bird, both in the gardens and along the roadside, was the Common Garden Bulbul (Pycnonotus barbatus). Rather homely and uncolourful, they were very vocal with typical liquid burbling bulbul sounds. Looking at the plate in the Field Guide illustrating some 16 Bulbuls, they seem sadly drab and crestless (crestfallen?) with pale yellow being the only relief from olives and browns. Our Indian Bulbuls score over them on all counts.

One morning, while waiting for breakfast, I was looking at a pair of Bulbuls on a bare-branched tree from my verandah, when by accident, the binoculars focussed on a small- munia sized - bird: brown, black and white. Its back was pale brown, it was white underneath and had a glossy black head and bib. Its sides were streaked. This was one of those rewarding moments when a brand new bird swims into your ken, obligingly perches on a visible bough, and remains long enough for a good hard look. So with the help of the good book I identified this as the Bronze Mannikin (Onchura cucullata). It is an Estrilidine weaver, I learnt, a seed-eating bird, with a nest which is not woven but "usually a domed structure of compacted grass tops". A strange name. Why Bronze? Why Mannikin?

It was probably a flock of these birds that I had seen from a distance in the grounds of the Hotel Ivoire in Abidjan, feeding on the ground. I couldn't see the streaked sides and had not been able to identify them then.

Driving along one of the many unfinished avenues through what was still jungle but wouldn't be for long, I stopped - much to the annoyance of the driver who thought that birdwatching was strictly for the birds - to try and focus on a bird that had crossed the highway. I couldn't see him, but on the top of a very tall tree, there were two reddish birds with very yellow beaks. They looked like large crossbills from below, but when they flew off, there was a bright flash of blue in the wings. Broad-Billed Rollers (Eurystomus glaucurus).

In the hotel grounds, I saw another bird with a very yellow bill and rufous underparts, similar in size but not in shape. It had a flattened head and I felt that it must be a Barbet. By rights it would have been a Yellow-Billed Barbet, but this, it seemed, was green in colour. Could it have been the Bearded Barbet (Lybius dubius)? Dubious, it certainly was.

Walking along a path in the forest between Yamassoukro and Abidjan, we saw two or three particularly interesting birds. There was the Redvented Malimbe (Malimbus scutatus) a striking red and black bird. There was the Senegal Coucal (Centropus senegalensis) a much more attractive bird than the Coucal that we are used to. It had a black head, and pale, almost white, underparts. The back was normal Coucal-coloured.

Perhaps the most fascinating sight was the Black and White-Tailed Hornbill (Lophoceros fasciatus). We saw several, flying slowly from one tall tree to another, attractive in their ungainliness. It has white underparts, with white outside tail feathers, and is black above. The bill is creamish, tipped with black.

As enjoyable as the sighting of new species of birds was the pleasure of my companion on the car trip. He was a vocational training specialist from Argentina and I was worried that he would object to stopping constantly along the roadside. As it turned out, by the end of the trip, he

had become an enthusiastic birdwatcher himself and took genuine delight in each new species we saw. One of the first things he did on returning to Geneva was to buy himself a pair of binoculars and a Field Guide. The ranks of birdwatchers in Geneva have swollen by at least one.

On that drive to Abidjan, we saw several Black Kites. Two days after my return to Geneva, I saw the first one in Geneva to return after its winter absence. I may be wrong, but it looked suspiciously like the one I had seen on the road from Yamassoukro to Abidjan.

Birdwatching in Egypt by S.K. Reeves

I see that in his Note on this subject in the March Issue of the Newsletter, Mr. Sudhir Vyas laments the paucity of books on Egyptian birds.

I am afraid I cannot offer him much comfort, for the books I am about to mention are very difficult to obtain, either by virtue of their rarity or high price. I mention them, however, in order to acquaint him with them in the hope that he may be able to find them in libraries.

The first and most important, because it is authoritatively written, well illustrated and was only published thirteen years ago, is 'The Birds of North Africa from the Canary Islands to the Red Sea' by R.D. Etchecopar and Francois Hue. The illustrations are by that excellent French bird artist Paul Barruel. It was translated from the French into English by P.A.D. Hollom - the editor of the 'Popular Handbook of British Birds' and co-author of 'A Field Guide to the Birds of Britain and Europe'. I cannot be sure, but I believe that this book is out of print, however Mr. Vyas neglects it at his peril.

Then, of course, there are the first two volumes (of seven) of that veritable magnum opus, 'Handbook of the Birds of Europe the Middle East and North Africa - The Birds of the Western Palearctic' by Stanley Cramp et al. The first volume was published in 1977 and the second is just to hand. Between them they cover, respectively, Ostriches to Ducks and Hawks to Bustards. This is, technically, a superb work, but at present limited in its coverage because only two volumes have been published to date.

Of older books, there is 'Handbook to the Birds of Egypt' by G.E. Shelley. This was published in 1872, contains 14 hand-coloured plates by Keulemans and gives a descriptive account with notes on habits and distribution and refers to books in which illustrations of the birds are to be found. I am not personally acquainted with the book, but it has been variously described as an important and excellent work.

Another old book which could prove useful in dealing with the commoner birds is, 'Egyptian Birds for the most part seen in the Nile Valley' by Charles Whympster and published in 1909. The book is not intended for the

scientist, but for the layman, who wishes to know something of the birds he sees in Egypt. The fifty-one colour plates by Whympers are truly enchanting bird pictures.

The following books on the birds of neighbouring regions would doubtless prove useful:-

- 'The Birds of Arabia' by Col. R. Meinertzhagen.
- 'The Birds of British Somaliland and the Gulf of Aden' by Sir Geoffrey Archer and Eva M. Godman.
- 'Birds of the Sudan' by Col. F.O. Cave and J.D. Macdonald.

The Eastern Blacknaped Oriole (*Oriolus chinensis diffusus*, Sharpe) in Calcutta by Kushal Mookherjee

In the backyard of our house in south Calcutta there are a few large trees. On the rainy afternoon of 13th October, 1977, I saw the bird sitting on the Bael tree. It was at once recognised as the Blacknaped Oriole (*Oriolus chinensis*). The golden yellow plumage with black in wings and tail and a broad black eye-band continued behind to meet over the nape, gave the bird a really handsome look. The stout bill was of light pink colour and the legs blackish. The really broad nape-band and the stout bill indicated that the bird was probably an Eastern Blacknaped Oriole (*Oriolus chinensis diffusus*, Sharpe) and not the Slenderbilled Blacknaped Oriole (*O.c. tenuirostris*, Blyth). The bird spread its wings and tail and drank the falling rain water. Though I was within 25 feet it showed no discomfort at my presence.

On the 12th October, 1978, I saw the bird again in our backyard. This time it roosted for the night on the Jack-fruit tree. Again on the afternoon of 28th October, 1978, I sighted it, being attracted by its repeated harsh cry, Kreee....

Throughout October 1979, I looked for the bird, but failed to find it. Then again on the 15th of March, 1980, the bird came at 4.30 p.m. This time it allowed me to approach within 10 feet to photograph it. I noticed a faint greenish wash on the back. The next day (16th March, 1980) the bird came again sharp at 4.30 p.m. This time though repeatedly chased by the House Crows, it roosted on the Jack-fruit tree.

The evening of 17th March, 1980, was stormy and the Oriole was caught when it fell from the mango tree of a neighbouring house. I measured it and found the following:-

Length - 26 cm. Bill (from feathers) - 31 mm. Wing - 150 mm.
Tail - 95 mm. Tarsus - 24 mm. Nape-band (Width) - 18mm.

The outer webs of the secondaries were broadly yellow and the bill was really stout. The nape-band was much broader than the 12 mm. limit of Slenderbilled Blacknaped Oriole (*O.c. tenuirostris*, Blyth). So the bird must be a Eastern Blacknaped Oriole (*O.c. diffusus*, Sharpe). The bird was released the next morning.

The distribution of Eastern Blacknaped Oriole (O.c. diffusus) in 'Handbook Of The Birds Of India And Pakistan' (1972) by Salim Ali and S.D. Ripley does not include West Bengal. The sighting of the bird at the same spot for two consecutive years (1977 and 1978) at nearly the same date (13th October & 12th October respectively) suggests its migratory nature and all the dates of the sightings (October & March) suggests that it is probably a passage migrant through Calcutta area.

Grey shrike and Black drongo hunting the scorpion and the centipede by Indra Kumar Sharma

Scorpions and centipedes often take shelter under heaps of bundles of harvested crops in fields. When cultivators remove these for threshing or storing, these get exposed. It was noted that the shrike (Lanius exubitor) and the Black Drongo (Dicrurus adsimilis) take advantage of such occasions for hunting disturbed scorpions, centipedes and insects. First they strike at the head and thorax of scorpions and centipedes to enjure, immobilise and weaken the prey, then overpower and kill the prey with repeated striking at various vital parts of the body, and carry it to a tree. In this way the Grey shrike and the Black drongo are useful birds in control of dangerous scorpions and centipedes besides other harmful pest insects.

Birdwatching in Kashmir by Narendra

When I was posted to Jammu & Kashmir, I had looked forward to an interesting encounter with the bird life of Kashmir. In my two years here, my wish was more than fulfilled. My sojourn started with one year in Poonch-Rajouri areas and now, after a harsh winter in areas 9000' to 13000' high, I made some interesting studies.

*they did not The most rewarding encounter was with an albino jungle babbler 6 km. short of Akhnoor from Jammu. It was hopping in the hedges with a group of jungle babblers. It must have been with that group for a long time, probably since 'object' to its being with them. I observed the albino from as near as 10' to 12' from my jeep for about 15 minutes. My companions were also fascinated by this phenomenon, as they too, like me, had seen an albino babbler for the first time.

Rajouri town, situated at a height of 4500' was possessed of all the common birds we see on the plains. I saw red munia, common and brahminy myna, redvented bulbuls, koels, purple sunbirds, hoopoes etc. As I went up to my place of duty at the height of 6500' and above. I was surprised to find the marked absence of redvented bulbuls. Nowhere above 6000' could I find a single redvented bulbul, but there was an abundance of white cheeked bulbuls. One of our forward defended localities was at a height of 5000' (approx.) There too the redvented bulbuls were not seen, though white cheeked were there. Even in other areas - in the Kashmir Valley, I have not seen redvented bulbuls anywhere. In a

shop in the interior, I was amused to see white cheeked bulbuls hopping on the bags of provisions, pecking at grains much to the consternation of the shop keeper. When he shoed them off, they would perch on snow outside the shop.

Similarly, at heights of more than 6000', I could not see a single rose-ringed parakeet. The blossom headed parakeets were almost everywhere. This fact needs verification by other birdwatchers and if established as true, this could be an interesting finding.

In the mountains of the Rajouri sector, I saw pied crested cuckoo, pied and white collared bushchats, the omnipresent jungle crows, swifts, jungle kites and blossomheaded parakeets and the Himalayan scaly bellied woodpecker. In the lower ridges, in the thickly wooded places near the springs, I saw a big colony of white-eyes, blackheaded golden oriole and junglefowl. While on a patrolling, I saw a pair of male and a female grey junglefowl in a courtyard of a local civilian. I was surprised to see them domesticated, moving about with other village hens. On inquiry, I was told that the villagers collect the eggs of wild fowl and have them incubated by their own hens. However, the experience of that civilian was, the junglefowl did not breed in their new environments. But the pair I saw was magnificent, almost double the size of local village fowl. We too bought a few eggs of junglefowl but unfortunately we could not have them incubated properly.

When I went to the valley (Kashmir Valley), there was not much of a change in the bird life. However, I saw grey tits in great numbers. At places above 12000', I saw in the scrub small birds of the size and colour of house sparrow. They were so shy of humans in uniform, they would fly away at the slightest of noises. I could scarcely observe them in detail. At 13000', I saw a magnificent bird of prey. It was rufous coloured, with black streaks about 1/2" long and about 2 mm wide. In size, it was that of a house crow, but features (head, beak, claws, wings) resembled a kestrel. Would some reader please identify it?

I moved quite a bit in the snow and towns, villages when they were under a thick carpet of snow, during this winter. All hoopoes were absent. Now that the snow has melted, hoopoes are back in circulation.

Where do hoopoes go in winter?

Rufousbacked Shrike in a temper by Dr. Ashok Kumar Sharma

It was late in the evening on 16th January, and I was standing under a Mangifera indica tree, when a Rufousbacked Shrike suddenly came out of a nearby hedge and perched on a dried twig about four feet away. It stared at me for a moment and then started shrieking. What intrigued me was not its shrieking but its subsequent violent attack with its beak on the broken end of the dried branch on which it was sitting. It wasn't satisfied with tearing and breaking off the pieces of that twig but ate a piece of the pith inside. When its rage finally died down, it flew away after staring at me for a few moments.

I couldn't explain this unusual behaviour except that it was probably started to find me standing under the tree to which it came to roost for the night. It was later on confirmed that the tree in question was its usual roosting site.

Nesting Season of the Purple Moorhen (*Porphyrio porphyrio*) by Nalin and Priya Nair

On the morning of 3rd April we went to watch birds at Pashan Lake just outside Poona. Among the many interesting birds we saw was a family party of Purple Moorhens --- two adults and three juveniles. The latter were about two-thirds of their parents' size, with smoky dark plumage and black instead of red beaks. Mr. Thomas Gay, who was with us, guessed they might be about 3 to 4 months old. The Book of Indian Birds gives the nesting season for these birds as "June to September". So the sight of even four-months-old young in April means that the season can extend even up to December.

Movement of Migratory Birds in Kachchh by S.N. Varu

I have maintained notes of the arrival and departure of some Migratory Birds in Kachchh in the year 1977-78. Extract of notes is given as detailed below:-

Sl.No.	Name of Bird	First seen	Last seen
1	2	3	4

1.	Common Sandpiper	22-7-77	25-4-78
2.	Marsh Sandpiper	7-8-77	14-5-78
3.	Terek Sandpiper	27-8-77	22-3-78
4.	Red Shank	"	25-3-78
5.	Green Shank	12-8-77	22-3-78
6.	Little Stint	26-7-77	25-4-78
7.	Common Snipe	20-9-77	22-3-78
8.	Blacktailed Godwit	27-8-77	"
9.	Ruff/Reeve	"	"
10.	Temminck's Stint	13-8-77	14-5-78
11.	White Wagtail	20-9-77	29-3-78
12.	Yellowheaded Wagtail	"	25-3-78
13.	Blackheaded Yellow Wagtail	"	"
14.	Coot	16-9-77	20-2-78
15.	Pintail Duck	10-12-77	25-2-78
16.	Shoveller Duck	"	25-3-78
17.	Hoopoe	31-7-77	16-3-78
18.	Rosy Pastors	"	25-4-78
19.	Pied Chat	13-8-77	25-2-78
20.	Desert Chat	22-11-77	19-2-78
21.	Isabelline Chat	29-10-77	4-2-78
22.	Marsh Harrier	16-9-77	25-3-78
23.	Greynecked Bunting	"	"

Aggressive Behaviour of *Tringa glareola* Spotted Redshank by KSR Krishna Raju

During my studies on the ecological aspects of certain migrant waders at Point Calimere in March 1972, I noted what can be called aggressive behaviour in *Tringa glareola*.

Three *Tringa glareola* were seen feeding together one afternoon and one among them appeared more dominant, aggressive and active. I marked them 'A', 'B', 'C' and the entry reads as follows:

'A' the dominant and 'B' and 'C' the innocents are feeding together. Suddenly 'A' came in between the other two and they gave way to the former, by moving apart. At this stage the peck rates are poor for the 'B' and 'C' and practically nil for 'A', which is restless - as evident from its actions. It again went in between them and this time 'B' moved apart but 'C' did not budge. There is no reason to think that that particular spot offers more food or has any other conceivable charm. However, on seeing the determined 'C', 'A' got apparently annoyed and began chasing it swiftly, giving one or two strong pecks and occasionally jumping above the ground. The chase and jumps with wings raised followed for about a minute or so, to a distance of about 15-20 yards from where 'C' flew off and 'A' resumed slow walk.

Such short chases and avoidances are not uncommon and were observed elsewhere both in *Charadrius dubius* and *Ch. alexandrinus* on the shorelines of great bitter lake and gulf of Suez in Egypt - as was noted by Simmons (1953). Similar behaviour was also recorded by Simmons (53) in the case of *Ch. leschenaulti*.

Such leap-frogging, if we are allowed to borrow the term coined by Nether-sole-Thompson was also recorded previously in the case of *Ch. apricaria* and *Tringa totanus* by the same author, but this perhaps is the first time that 'Leap-frogging' is recorded in *T. glareola*.

References: Simmons, K.E.L. (1953): Some aspects of aggressive behaviour in Plovers' IBIS: 95(115P).

Acknowledgements: I am grateful to Dr. Salim Ali for his guidance during the research work and to Shri. J.C. Daniel for his help.

Bat seizing Bird by Thomas Gay

On the evening of 19 January, I just missed a direct sight of an event that must surely be very rare.

About 6 p.m., hearing some commotion outside our flat, I went out and found my grandchildren and the neighbours' children excitedly discussing something they had just seen. This was a bat, they told me, which they had seen clinging to the top strand of our barbed-wire fence (about 5 feet above the ground) with a small bird in its clutches. A crow had been watching with interest from an overhanging branch, while a cat gazed up with no less interest from the ground below. Unfortunately, the whole group had separated just before I came out of the house.

The bird, I was told, had managed to flutter off and had disappeared. The best description the children could give of it suggested Indian Robin. I was shown where the bat had gone, and there I found it hanging, about six feet up, on a rough stone wall. Its body was about the size of an ordinary House Rat.

Does any reader know of another instance of a bird being seized by a bat?

Correspondence

Social and Sexual Behaviour of Sparrows by V. Santharam

I had written sometime back about the House Sparrow's behaviour (the male attacking the female as she approached his nest) which was observed by Shri. V.J. Rajan. So I would be glad if you could add the following material which I have collected from Tinbergen's "Social Behaviour in Animals" which could be a more likely explanation than the one already quoted from Dr. Buxton's book. The following is the portion from Tinbergen:

"Blue herons (as described by Verwey) live solitarily during the winter and return to the breeding colonies in spring. The males arrive first, and take up a position on an old nest of the previous year, or on a place where they are going to build a new nest. Here each of them utters the 'song', a harsh, monosyllabic call, not very pleasant to the human ear, but attractive to the females. When a female arrives, it settles on a branch near the male of her choice. The male begins to court at once, but when the female responds by approaching, he wards her off, and a skirmish or even a furious fight may ensue. When the female flies off, the male at once resumes his frantic calling, and then she may turn and return to him. This again may evoke hostile reactions, but gradually the aggressiveness subsides, the birds begin to tolerate each other, and eventually mate. It is clear that the male, and presumably the female as well, reacted to the partner in two ways: by a sexual response, drawing them together for the purpose of mating, and by an aggressive response, possibly mingled with fear, or the tendency to escape. Gradually the sex drive overcomes the hostile tendencies. This change in the relative strength of the various drives involved may be due in part to a learning process, the birds getting sex drive under the influence of the repeated and prolonged sexual stimulation from the partner. That growth of the sex drive plays a part is indicated by the fact that skirmishes are rare, or short, in pairs that form later in the season. Males that have been waiting for a mate for a fortnight are so strongly motivated sexually by the time a female joins them that they may accept her almost at once."

Relevant extracts from Maurice Burton by V. Santharam

I recently went through an interesting book on Animal Behaviour entitled "Just Like An Animal" by Maurice Burton. On Page 26, 'Chapter-2 Animal

Manners', I came across some interesting observations which will, I hope, throw some light on the two queries that appeared in the 1979 issues of the Newsletter. I am reproducing the relevant parts below, with my own comments.

(a) House Sparrows by V.J. Rajan (January 1979 issue): "Birds have smooth brains and outstandingly their behaviour tends to be ritualized (or stylized).

This comes out in the treatment of the female by the male. Sparrows have been quoted as an example of male birds being non-aggressive towards the females. Yet the general rule is that when a female bird enters the territory of a male, in the normal course of seeking a mate, his first reaction is to attack her as an intruder. It is his way of finding out whether her intentions are honourable. An intruding male when attacked shows fight. An intruding female goes into a submissive attitude thereby demonstrating that she is a female, beyond a shadow of doubt, and one intent on reproduction. When this test has been passed, courtship proceeds with the male showing her the difference due to her sex".

So it would be interesting if Mr. Rajan could write on the reaction of the female on the "vigorous pecking of the male" when she approached the nest or territory of the resident male.

(b) Birdwatching at Atherampallev by R. Sugathan (September, 1979 issue)

"At one end of the lawn a starling was feeding on household scraps. A cock blackbird, the bully of the garden, tried to usurp the food but was driven off by the starling. Later, a newly-fledged song thrush edged towards the starling, which turned aggressively to the thrush and charged as it had at the blackbird. The force of the rush pushed the young thrush on to its tail, whereupon it opened its beak wide. Gaping is the releaser signal of most young birds to which the parents automatically respond by pushing food down their throats. The starling automatically responded too. Its aggression vanished and it fed the thrush. This was genetic altruism, an automatic or instinctive response by an adult bird to the sight of a wide-open beak".

It is therefore interesting to note that Mr. Sugathan also noticed the behaviour of the young cuckoo-shrike as it approached the racket-tailed drongo gaping for food, which as Mr. Burton says acts as a 'releaser signal' of the young birds to which parent birds automatically respond. This sort of 'genetic altruism' seems to be more obvious in the case of the babblers which are more social birds for it is very common to see the young babbler chick being fed by birds other than the parent birds themselves.

Nesting, not feeding by V. Santharam

This is with reference to my article 'Notes from My Bird-Diary'. I had, in the above mentioned article, written on the 'odd feeding habit of white-breasted kingfisher'. In this note, I had written that the reason for the bird's clinging to the wall, near the cavity was for the purpose of feeding. But my recent observations indicate that it was not the main

reason. This morning I noticed a couple of them in the same place (as mentioned in the note). There are two cavities on the wall (which also serves as the wall to the adjoining house). I saw them entering the cavities, which were large enough to accommodate one bird at a time. The bird that entered one cavity was obviously digging as some dust, sand and other particles were seen falling outside. So I guess they were only attempting to nest. My observations of the last year indicating that it could have been a feeding habit doesn't seem to fit, although they could have incidentally come across an insect or some such thing and fed on it.

If the birds are trying to nest, then this is another incident to show that birds are instinctive in behaviour and not intelligent for the nest can never come off as the tunnel would lead to the interior of the house.

Sparrow feeds on young garden lizard by V. Santharam

I was a bit surprised when I read Shri. Lavkumar Khacher's comment in the February 1979 issue of the "Newsletter" where he mentioned that he had seen redvented bulbuls feeding on lizards. But I was even more surprised when I was told by my parents that they had seen a house sparrow attacking a small garden lizard and eventually feeding on it, having battered it on the ground as the mynas did. This incident occurred on the afternoon of 25th March 1979. Though sparrows are omnivorous birds, and known to feed on a variety of items, it is surprising to find them feeding on young lizards.

Frigate Bird by Vivek Kunte

Regarding Mr. Santharam's note, on Friday 29-2-80 at about 5 p.m. I had observed the frigate bird over the bridge on Adyar River near Theosophical Society. Being on a scooter in the traffic I could not observe the bird in detail but the flight profile indicated it was a frigate bird. It was flying from the sea up the river at a height of about 100 feet.

Identification Problem by Vivek Kunte

I had been to Rameshwaram on 23rd February 1980 and saw two birds which I could not identify and I would appreciate any help. My notings were:

1) Kite + white underside and under wings, long white tail, black spot at the base of tail (could be feet), yellowish pink beak shaped like a crow's. Flying profile similar to a parakeet's. Flight - continuous flapping of wings. A pair seen on sunny afternoon at 3.30 p.m. circling above temple gopuram at Rameshwaram on 23.2.80.

2) Myna + white underside and under the tail, thin = 4-5 in long legs, black thin straight beak = 2 in long, dusty brown head neck and breast, back and wings dark brown. Seen on Rameshwaram beach at 6.30 p.m. Clear sky. Single specimen on the beach. Observed walking about on the beach with constant up and down bobbing of stumpy tail and back and forth motion of head at the same time. Occasionally jabbing the beak into the ground to pick up something. Observed for about 15 minutes but no call heard and no attempt at flight in that period. Also was patrolling only about 15 feet long stretch of the beach.

Migrants arriving in U.K. (9.4.80) by Sydnev Reeves

We are now eagerly awaiting the arrival of the Summer Migrants. The first few chiff-chaffs, yellow wagtails and Wheatears have come in, and our local colony of Avocets is building up steadily. There are also reports of some Terns having been seen. Of rarities, a Red Kite, a Goshawk and an Osprey have passed through. The Divers and Grebes seem to have left our inshore waters. Other deserters are the Snow Bunting, Lapland Buntings and the Shore Larks.

Golden Orioles by Prakash Garde

With reference to the Miscellaneous Notes by Shri Thomas Gay (December '79 issue) wherein he has mentioned hearing Golden Orioles calling much after their breeding season, i.e. in October-November 1979, I would like to mention that I too have heard Golden Orioles calling in mid-November this year at Nagpur.

I may mention one more incident about this species which, I think, is quite significant. I saw a Golden Oriole (male) hovering over 3-4 feet tall grass in a lake and hawking insects flushed out by the fanning of its wings. It was at the Koradi tank about 15 kms. from Nagpur at 9.30 a.m. on 16.12.1979 in broad day light. The bird was perching in a mango tree on the bank and making sorties approximately every five minutes over a patch of grass about 40 yards inside the water line. It made three such sorties, flew to another bush some 400 yards away, returned to its original place in the mango tree after some time and did one more sortie before flying away. While hovering over the patch of grass, the bird was moving to and fro with wings beating steadily. It would catch some insect in mid-air and return to its perch to finish it off. I and my two friends watched it from a distance of approx. 20 yards from the patch of grass.

Newsletter Problems by Indra Kumar Sharma

It is regretted that only 140 subscribers have renewed subscription for 1980, where you had a target for 500. I and Mr. Liyaqutalla Khan discussed the March issue of NLBW and we had coinciding opinion that NLBW wastefully wasted seven pages on 'Bird Migration in Madras' by Mr. Santharam which interest little. That note could be given in two pages concisely deleting literal language. NLBW should not publish articles more than three pages at the most, concise informative language should be used to give more informations. NLBW should contain more concise informative notes and comments, then NLBW would be popular. Articles on economic ornithology and ecological aspects ornithology should be preferred that will popularise NLBW into forest department, zoological survey and zoological departments of universities. In Jodhpur, Dr. Bhusan Prakash, and Central Arid Zone Research Institute used to subscribe NLBW but they have discontinued it for the last two years. Hoping my suggestion will appeal you having practical creative approach.

(The primary function of the NLBW is to enable and encourage amateur birdwatchers to communicate with each other. A too technical approach might lend to discourage this. Editor)

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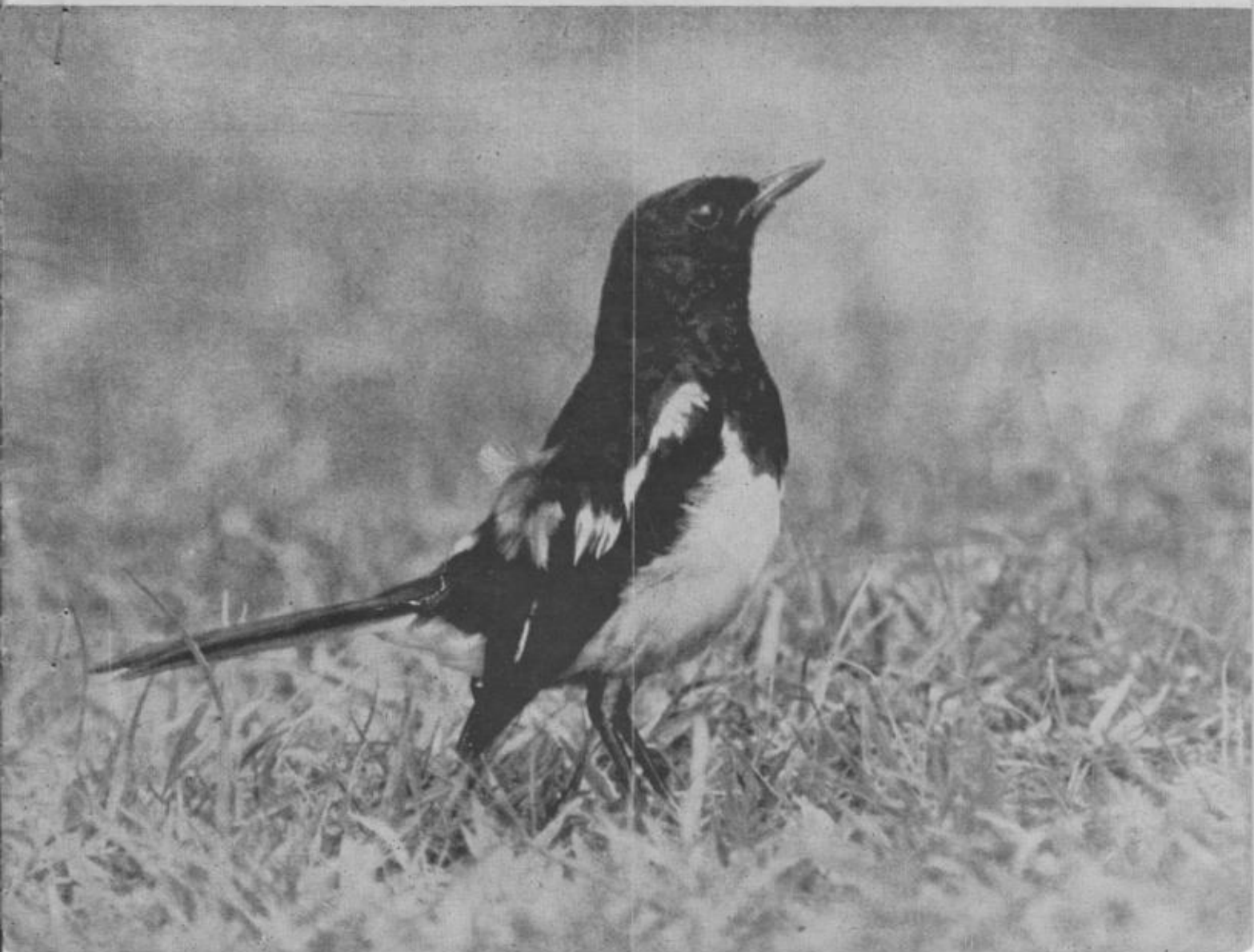
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Newsletter for Birdwatchers

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NEWSLETTER.
FOR BIRDWATCHERS

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Editorial

I must apologise again for skipping the June issue. But the July one I hope compensates by being somewhat fatter than the normal ones.

There is a great deal of correspondence from our readers and it will take me sometime to read and process them for publication. May I again request contributors to send me typed notes, otherwise dealing with them is a headache both actually and figuratively speaking. I might also suggest that in most cases it is not necessary to mention the latin names of birds. The latin name should be given only in cases where identities have to be emphasized or when the common name is not a definite enough description of the bird. When lists are given of birds seen in a particular locality they should be organised under the heading of different Families as has been done for example in the article published in this issue by Mrs. Inga Willis. A jumbled list with Families and Genera mixed up is much less valuable than one as suggested above.

Though we have many enthusiastic birdwatchers in our group a recent find in Dr. Asha Chandola of Banaras Hindu University appears to be a rare species even for this group. In a recent letter she writes " and of course we spotted birds galore. It was such a heady experience - I suppose all novices react like that but I am so absolutely carried away. We just returned yesterday evening and I have decided after packing the students off to Varanasi to return to Chamoli district in the Garwal Himalayas for a week or so. We spotted scarlet minivets at 3750m in Tunganath; Kaleej Pheasants (so many of them at 2,000m); and lovely little flowerpeckers and flycatchers which I will need more time and visits to identify; and Longtailed Sibias. It was such a lovely experience and I am thrilled because the students shared it with me".

Dr. Chandola is now with Lavkumar Khachar in his Manali Camp and I have no doubt that she must have found the trip absolutely stupendous. The uninhibited expression of ones feelings while birdwatching is a quality greatly appreciated by the Editor. Of course the enthusiasm must be backed by careful observation and identification as is the case in this instance.

The Editor has also received several accounts of birds observed during the Eclipse. Most of them are not of much value for the reaction of birds during a short period of darkness is predictable and calls for no special scientific explanation. Many of the articles now in the editors tray are unnecessarily long. My advice to all contributors is never to use two words where one will do.

ZAFAR FUTEHALLY

Birds at Anaikatti by Mrs. I.M. Willis

I find it very difficult to give a true picture of the bird-life at Anaikatti; I have been there so many times (7 at least, over the past 5 years) and seldom for less than a week, and perhaps quite a few of the birds listed here only identified at my 2nd or 3rd visit.

Over such a period it looks a formidable list, but many hours of observation have gone to its compilation.

Anaikatti Forest Bungalow is reached from Ootacamund by descending the Segur Ghat Road, and, after crossing the Segur bridge, taking a turning to the right about 2 km on - 9 km. of extremely bad road, with 2 rivers to cross really only jeepable, but we did it last year in our Ambassador, and cracked the sump. (N.B. A mixture of soap and cowdung makes an adequate temporary patch!)

One takes all one's requirements-including drinking water - all water has to be man-handled up from the river a 1/4 of a mile away, by a man with a yoke and 2 pails.

We booked the bungalow through Ooty Wildlife Office 5 days in advance - but when we got there on the appointed day just before dusk, the place was all locked up, and the bungalow-watcher absent - we had to break in, and then send someone to the village in haste to get a water-boy.

The bungalow is pleasantly sited below the crest of a gentle southward-facing slope, and looking across scrub jungle up to the line of hills that form the plateau on which Ooty is situated.

There is no perimeter boundary or fencing of any kind - just scrub-jungle and a few larger trees dotted here and there, and the age-old game-trails criss-cross it on every side from the verandah I have seen monkeys, wild dog, jackals, mongoose, innumerable spotted deer, and, on 2 occasions an elephant.

But these are a bonus, as it were, and for me the real interest of Anaikatti is the abundance and variety of the bird-life to be seen there.

Not notably an early-riser, here I get up between 5.30-45 and, warmly clad, out on the verandah with binoculars and note-book.

The verandah is 4 feet high and equally wide (because of elephants). I will have placed a chair where I want it the night before, so as to make the least possible disturbance, and the stars are often still bright in the sky when I begin my watch.

The first birds will be heard, not seen; The bubbling sound of a nightjar

continuously repeated, the cat-like call of a peacock, 5 or 6 times over, then, a little later, jungle-cocks crowing from several different directions. One sight there I shall never forget. As the sun rose, it struck a patch of brilliant colour in one of the trees in front - a look through the glasses revealed 3 chestnut-headed bee-eaters, pressed close together on a branch, who had obviously spent the night there, the sun's rays lighting up the rusty red of the crown, and yellow breast with a black slash across the throat, and pale blue lower parts. Once the sun has risen, many varieties of birds can be both seen and heard, and the list that follows is what I have seen in a single day from the bungalow. Only where there might be a difficulty in distinguishing which particular bird is meant, will I give the latin names.

Capitonidae: Large Green Barbet, Coppersmith or Crimson-breasted Barbet

Pycnonotidae: Redvented Bulbul

Dicruridae: White-bellied Drongo

Muscicapidae: Lesser Whitethroat, Jungle Wren-Warbler, Southern White-browed Fantail Flycatcher, Tailor Bird, Magpie Robin, Indian Robin

Nectarinidae: Purplerumped Sunbird

Cuculidae: Crow-Pheasant

Corvidae: Jungle Crow, Southern Tree-pie

Laniidae: Rufousbacked Shrike, Baybacked Shrike, Small Brown Shrike

Picidae: Yellow-fronted Pied or Mahratta Woodpecker, Golden-backed Woodpecker

Sittidae: Velvet-fronted Nuthatch

Hirundinidae: Redrumped Swallow

Accipitridae: Indian Crested Hawk-eagle

Falconidae: Falcon

Dicaeidae: Thick-billed Flowerpecker

Alcedinidae: Small Blue Kingfisher (seen at river crossing)

Meropidae: Green Bee-eater

Sturnidae: Brahminy Mynah

Caprimulgidae: Nightjar

Peridae: Grey Tit

Irenidae: Common Iora

The above is a typical day's list of birds seen and/or heard from Anaikatti bungalow over a period of 24 hours. Below I give other birds seen on different visits from the bungalow, and a further list of birds seen when I have accompanied my husband on shooting trips in the vicinity.

Phasianidae: Jungle Bush-quail

Muscicapidae: Nilgiri Verditer Flycatchers, Seven sisters (I have been told these are Whiteheaded Babblers), Blackbird, South Indian or Nilgiri Wren-Warbler

Psittacidae: Blue-winged Green Parakeets

Falconidae: Nilgiri Kestrel

Accipitridae: Blackwinged Kite

Apodidae: Alpine Swift

Laniidae: Blackbacked Pied Flycatcher Shrike
Upupidae: Hoopoe
Pittidae: Pitta
Zosteropidae: White-eye
Dicruridae: Black Drongo

Birds seen in surrounding countryside:-

Muscicapidae: Tickell's Blue Flycatcher, Whitebrowed Groundthrush
Motacillidae: Eastern Grey Wagtail
 Brownheaded Stork
Alcedinidae: Billed Kingfisher
Oriolidae: Blackheaded Oriole Irenidae:
 Goldfronted Chloropsis
Charadriidae: Both red and yellow wattled Lapwings
Campephagidae: Blackheaded Cuckoo-Shrike
Columbidae: Nilgiri Wood Pigeon, Green Pigeon
Cuculidae: Koel
Psittacidae: Lorikeet
Pycnonotidae: Hill or Redwhiskered Bulbuls, Rubythroated Bulbul
Ploceidae: Whitebacked Munias
Phasianidae: Spur and Junglefowl
Laniidae: Graybacked Shrike
Sittidae: Chestnut-bellied Nuthatch
Rallidae: Whitebreasted Waterhen

There are others that I have not been able to identify, even after several sightings, but I think the lists I have given will give quite a good idea of the birds in this area.

Some Observations on the Nests of Yellow-wattled Lapwing, Stone Curlew, Blackbellied Finch-Lark and Redwinged Bush-Lark by V. Santharam

I have been very lucky this summer, in tracking some bird nests at Adyar estuary. Last year (that is in 1978), I had tried a lot to find nests especially of the yellow-wattled lapwing, a very common bird of the flat areas, adjoining the estuary but had no luck except in finding a single nest with only one egg (and that too vanished the next morning) and a few pieces of broken egg shells on the ground. So I was very eager to find some nests this season and I must admit that luck was on my side. I was not only able to spot lapwings' nests but also nests of three other species, excluding the small green bee-eaters which had commenced their nesting activities since February end, ashy swallow shrikes, which were nesting on the palm trees along with the palm swifts, drongo, spotted dove, hoopoe, Indian roller and many other species, all of which were nesting in the neighbourhood.

The four species which I mainly concentrated on and was lucky enough to discover nests are: yellow-wattled lapwing, stone curlew, blackbellied finch lark and redwinged bushlark. I could not, unfortunately, locate any nests of the red-wattled lapwing and paddy field pipit, which were also breeding in the area. I have divided this article into four parts, each dealing with a species.

Yellow-wattled Lapwing (*Vanellus malabaricus*)

One of the most common and conspicuous birds of the estuary, throughout the year is the yellow-wattled lapwing. The terrain with open land with few bushes scattered about is quite ideal for the breeding of these attractive birds. They are very noisy in their breeding season which commences by April and the birds are always engaged in combats with crows, which take a fancy in attacking these birds. If one approaches the nest, the lapwings get noisier and often rise, calling loudly and fly overhead at a very low height. I have noticed that the birds which call when I approached the nest site are not only the nesting birds but also some good natured neighbours. Birds ranging from 2-6 or even more call simultaneously from various directions and distract one's attention. Is this a social behaviour of these birds? Or are the birds calling together because all of them have nests in the neighbourhood? After calling, the nearest bird (probably with a nest nearby) making sure it has drawn the attention of the intruder, tries to lure him away from the spot by a broken leg display. The bird walks in an absurd manner with bent legs, as though it had suddenly grown lame, with its body close, to the ground. Often it squats on the ground, without stopping the calls, (to give the impression it has a nest there, or to show that it is too weak?) and after a few seconds walks a few paces and repeats this act.

The nest is merely a scrape on the ground without any cover, surrounded by pebbles, twigs, pieces of dry cowdung and sometimes sea shells. The one nest, observed last year had the scrape covered with pieces of shells. In all the nests observed, the nest and its contents merged with perfection into its surroundings. The pattern of the eggs laid in the nest, generally, seemed to have their narrower ends meeting in the middle, though it was not the case always. The markings on the eggs varied and had atleast two distinct varieties. One had the darker markings and blotches smaller and more in number while another had larger and fewer blotches. Is there any reason for this kind of distinction in the pattern of the egg?

Birds are supposed to lay eggs in the early mornings. If this applies to the lapwings, then the birds should be laying eggs every alternate day or with a gap of over two days. I hope the following observation could justify this statement. On the evening of 6.6.79, I found a nest with one egg, laid in a scrape surrounded by pebbles. I could not go to the site the next day and when I went to the nest on the

evening of 8th, I found only one more egg added in the nest, though there should have been three eggs by the date. I could not watch further developments at this nest as the eggs were missing when I next came to the spot. Could any reader suggest the time-gap between the laying of one egg and the next?

What is the period of incubation of eggs in the case of the lapwing? I have two, rather scanty, observations. I had seen 4 eggs in a nest on 29.6.79. On 21.7.79 (i.e. on the 23rd day since the eggs were first seen), three of the eggs hatched and the young ones were seen at about 4.45 p.m. The unhatched egg probably hatched the next morning. The other nest, also with 4 eggs was located on 3.7.79. Accidentally, I stamped one of them, leaving behind three eggs. The nest survived and on 24.7.79 (i.e. on the 22nd day since they were first seen), two of the three eggs hatched, though only one chick and the unhatched egg could be seen in the nest. Both nests had the eggs hatched mainly in the late afternoon, at about 4.00 - 4.30 p.m.

All the young ones observed had down feathers and were seen moving, though some very clumsily, tripping often as they moved. They uttered a single-noted call which sounded something like 'phiv'. The crown, back and wings had olive green feathers with dark blotches, spots etc., a dark (black?) stripe bordered the crown at the nape and there was a whitish collar round the hind neck (separating the olive green of the crown and back). The whitish underparts were tinged with buff. The beak was black and the legs generally pale yellow and in one case greenish. The size of the newly-hatched chick was about 1 1/2 times that of the egg and when squatting or 'freezing' to the warning calls of the parent birds, it has a shape similar to that of the egg. When freezing, the young birds tolerate even the ants which move on their head and body. The young birds are led away from the nest as soon as they are hatched. In the first case in about half an hour's time the chicks had moved 35 - 40 yards away from the nest.

On one occasion, I had a face-to-face encounter with an immature lapwing. It was slightly smaller than the adult bird with dark brown head, duller ashy brown on the back, less prominent wattles and white underparts. It was lying under a bush just a couple of feet from me. Till I squatted, the bird remained frozen, without any movement. As soon as I sat down, the bird rose and ran fast, halting at a distance, pretending to feed again running a few paces, again pretending to feed etc. The speed with which it moved was quite amazing.

On the whole, I had seen 7 nests. The total number of eggs being 18. Of these, 6 were smashed, 5 missing and 7 hatched safely. A total number of 10 chicks including 7 which were observed as eggs at first were seen. Some immature birds were also seen. The high mortality rate of over 61% of the eggs observed of this species is due to the presence of cattle (on one morning I counted over 30 head of cattle) and also that of graziers, fishermen and other people including birdwatchers (I myself had stamped one!). Given some protection, the birds may have a better chance of survival.

Stone Curlew (*Burhinus oedicnemus*)

A friend of mine had seen the stone curlew at Adyar estuary from the Theosophical Society estate on one of the islets in April 1978. Hoping to see this elusive bird, I went to the place in the last week of April and saw three birds moving on the islet and also heard them as the crows chased them. I was of the opinion that these birds were only local migrants as far as the estuary was concerned. But I was soon proved to be wrong.

My concept of the birds being local migrants was due to my failure in locating them when I visited the place during the next few visits. But I must admit that all along I had been hearing some calls resembling those of the stone curlew's, which I had heard only once previously. Moreover, these calls bore a resemblance to the calls of the Koel's "kilk...kilk...kilk..." and I often asked myself whether I was hearing the Koel or the curlew. This led me to conclude that the birds might have been casual visitors, as they are said to move about locally.

On 8.7.79, as Shri. R.V. Mohan Rao, a keen bird-watcher and a friend of mine, and I were sitting on the water edge of Adyar estuary near the open field, my friend casually glanced behind and viewed the field with his binoculars. To his surprise, he noticed a stone curlew. Immediately, we focussed our field glasses on the bird, which was very well camouflaged and difficult to locate with the naked eyes. Surrounding the bird were some crows. We carefully crawled nearer to get a better view of the bird and to our surprise, we noticed another bird nearby, squatting under a bush. Our suspicions arose and we headed towards the bush, to be proved right.

As we approached the site, the birds vanished and after some difficulty, we located the exact bush under which the bird had squatted. There was a 'nest' and it contained two eggs. The 'nest' was nothing but a scrape of sand on the ground, surrounded by twigs, a couple of oyster shells, some dry leaves a few pieces of a broken earthen-ware pot, pieces of dry cowdung etc. The inner part of the 'nest' seemed to have been cleared of grass and other matters.

The two eggs were quite larger than that of the lapwings which I am quite familiar with. (According to the measurements given by Dr. Salim Ali in the "Handbook", they are about $1 \frac{1}{3}$ times larger than the lapwings). The ground colour was paler and the spots and blotches were larger but less in number when compared to the other bird. The ground colour was pale olive-green with dark and purplish blotches and marking. One end was pointed and as the eggs lay parallel to each other, a few millimeters apart, they were facing the opposite directions. As it was late, we moved away.

I went to watch the nest again on 10.7.79. Today the eggs were facing the same direction unlike the previous occasion. I sat about 150 yards away from the nest from where I could, with the aid of binoculars, watch

the activities of the birds without bothering them. The birds slowly came back after a few minutes and one of them sat on the eggs, brooding them. The other was standing nearby, preening its feathers. Soon the crows arrived and the alert mate got into action. His (?) duty was quite obvious now and that was to ward off the intruders. He(?) would rush at the crows and chase them. After a while the crows gave up and went in search of other innocent birds.

I soon got opportunities to watch the reaction of the birds to the presence of the intruders. As soon as the birds see a person within a distance of about 100 yards, they move away from the site, running fast without any noise or without making their presence felt.

Some days later, when an immature shikra appeared, the incubating bird (which was alone) craned its neck up, sensing some danger and located the raptor. Immediately, it reacted to protect its nest. The bird crouched and spread its neck flat, parallel to the ground, almost touching it and remained stiff and frozen. Only after a few minutes when the crows had chased the shikra about 500 yards away from the nest, the bird regained its normal posture.

At first, when we talked loudly, the bird would crane its neck and look at us but never attempted to move away. Later on, it appeared to ignore this disturbance. The noise produced by vehicles like scooters, at first disturbed them. But later on they got used to such noises and never attempted to leave the eggs.

One morning, there were plenty of cattle grazing nearby. The first cow passed the nest within 10 - 15 feet. The bird remained unperturbed. The second moved closer and passed the incubating bird within 5 feet or so. The third cow came directly towards the nest. The bird was alert now (even now there was only one bird at the nest). It got up, having surveyed with outstretched neck and sensing the threat. Then it moved to the cow and spread the wings as a shield vertically. The tail feathers were also fanned out. The bird stood erect. This was in all probabilities, a "threatening posture" adopted to frighten the intruder (In the film produced by the RSPB on the breeding of Avocets, the birds were shown behaving similarly to the presence of a curlew near the nest of the former). The bird, which was silent all the while, turned back and again faced the cow. The cow reacted by sniffing loudly close to the eggs and this noise attracted other cows to the site. The bird now moved away from the site. I then had to intervene to save the nest from the possible trampling of eggs by the cows. The cows moved off and later the bird returned.

The birds also did not object to the hide put up by Shri M. Krishnan, who came to photograph the nest and the birds, though it was pitched within 12 - 15 feet of the nest. I was told that the birds returned within 15 minutes. After some two hours, the hide was shifted to another position and even now the birds seemed to be least bothered. What was more surprising was that all the while the window flap of the khakhi - coloured hide was wildly swaying in the breeze!

But all the excitements came to an end in about a week's time. On 16th July, when I visited the nest, there were no birds to be seen and the nest was empty. It is not known whether the eggs had hatched or if somebody had removed them. It is more likely that the second alternative had taken place as during my half an hour's quest, I could neither see a bird nor a chick. A number of people came here and it is likely that they had accidentally come across the nest and removed the eggs. Later I went to the other side of the estuary and located at least 3 pairs of stone curlews. I am sure that they are nesting there for two birds were seen in the brooding posture with the mates nearby. Let us hope at least these nests would hatch successfully.

Blackbellied Finch-Lark (*Eremopterix grisea*)

I noticed a female finch-lark moving towards a plant on the side of a mound. It had something in its beak as it went towards the plant. It suddenly saw me following it and flew away. I suspected a nest and carefully made a search and found one on the underside of the plant.

The nest was a small depression. Later on I measured it roughly and found it was 6.1 cm x 5.4 cm and with a depth of about 3.2 cm. It was lined with grass, thread etc. As it was directly under the plant which was fairly dense and well spread, the two chicks were well-camouflaged. They were probably 2 - 3 days old, naked, with the bare dark skin visible. Some pale brown - coloured feathers were just appearing. My first impression on seeing these two creatures, moving as they breathed was that they resembled the hairy caterpillars. I moved some distance and after a while noticed the female feeding her young.

This was the first of the four nests seen. Of these only two nests survived. Two nests with 2 and 3 eggs (usually the birds are supposed to lay 2 eggs) respectively did not survive and they were trampled by cattle or by human beings. Of these, I retained an egg shell which had two or three holes. The colour of the tiny eggs were yellowish white with black and darkish spots. They were oval in shape. All the nests were depressions lined invariably with thread and grass and normally placed under a bush.

I could not determine the incubating period as all of the nests were discovered in the middle of incubation and only one with eggs survived and hatched. But I would like to make some suggestions as to the period of stay of young in the nest. The first nest (about which I had already made a mention) was discovered on 21st May when the chicks were 2-3 days old. They were seen in the nest till 27th May, by which the young had a well-developed plumage and resembled the female bird. On 28th I could not see the chicks in the nest but I noticed the female nearby with some food material in her beak. On 29th June, I found another nest with 2 eggs and the eggs were seen till 3rd July. When I went to the nest site on 5th, there were 2 chicks. They were either hatched on 4th or that morning. On 8th the eyes were open and I saw the chicks till 11th. When I went again on 13th, they were not seen. In both cases it comes to 9 - 10 days.

The chicks were mainly fed by the female and only occasionally fed by the male. The parent birds were very careful and would proceed to the nest cautiously. Once the female was moving to the nest with some food, when all of a sudden some crows flew overhead. The reaction was instantaneous. It hid itself under a bush and waited till the crows were well away from the site. The chicks which remain frozen, on seeing the parent bird would at once open their mouths, popping up their heads, revealing orangish (more yellowish) mouths. As soon as the female turns back, they would lie without any movement, as before.

Only twice I have observed the feeding gap. On the first occasion, after my appearance, the first feeding was made at 5.55 p.m., the second at 6-10 p.m. and the third at 6.18 p.m. After this the parent did not return and the young looked as though they had settled for the night. This was on 25th May at the first nest. On 26th, I found the gap to be 15, 10 and 20 minutes. During this 45 minutes observation, the hen was seen removing the dropping - a white capsule twice.

Besides, these nests, I have noticed many old and abandoned nests. Once I noticed the female constructing a nest. But later on, the nest was abandoned for no obvious reason.

Redwinged Bush Lark (*Mirafra erythroptera*)

On 3rd July, I saw a nest of the redwinged bush lark. It was made almost entirely of grass and had a 'dome'. This was set in a small depression near some plants. The shape of the nest was somewhat like that of a cave. Inside, there were 3 eggs. They were slightly larger than the finch lark's and seemed to be more pointed at the narrow end. The ground colour was greyish-white with dark brown to blackish spots. On 5th also the eggs were seen and on 7th, I found that the eggs had hatched. The chicks were lying in a jumbled-up position. They had probably hatched the previous day.

I could notice the parent birds moving about and they were at times calling to distract my attention. Even on going further back to some 60-80 yards from the nest the parent birds were rather reluctant to feed the young flitting and moving hither and thither carrying some small worms and insects.

The chicks' eyes were not open on 8th. But on 10th, they had opened. The feathers were now sprouting and they were brownish in colour. The mouth was more reddish than that of the finch-lark chicks. The growth of feathers was also comparatively slower in this case. On 13th, some feathers were seen on the crown. But they still had the slaty black(?) body. On 16th July, one of the chicks that had been lying out of the nest had almost full-developed feathers except for the tail feathers. This particular chick when observed some 34 hours previously did not have much feathers. The rate of growth in these larks is quite remarkable. The other two chicks did not have such well developed feathers. On 19th, all the chicks were well developed and were able to fly and were out of the nest. Later on, when I went to the vicinity of the nest, the young birds were seen moving about.

Earlier on 17th June, I had noticed a single chick, just out of the nest in a ditch it uttered a single 'cheep' very often. As it walked clumsily, it often stumbled and fell on its belly. I did not find any other chicks or even the nest. Later I could not find the chick but I presume it has survived.

P.S: I am very grateful to Shri. Lavkumar Khacher for having gone through this article carefully and making many corrections.

Birding in Aligarh by Abdul Jamil Urfi

The Aligarh district in Western Uttar Pradesh attracts thousands of birds in winter owing to the numerous jheels and 'bambas' (mini cannals). The forests in the area, except for mangroves or clusters of trees, are sparse but still the bird life is plentiful. Since open grasslands and marshes are prevalent widely, the birds present are typical of such localities. About fifteen kilometres from the city proper, lies a birdwatcher's paradise - Sekha village with large ponds and marshes adjoining it.

The area looks forbidding and dry in summer inspite of the vegetation consisting of sheesham, neem, mango and short grasses. I have with the birders of the Nature Conservation Society of Aligarh, identified approximately 90 species of birds in this area (this number does not include those seen near Narora on the banks of Ganges). Those which were apparently rare and caused some excitement were: Geese and Duck: Two pairs of Nukta (Sarkidiornis melanotos) in company of surkhabs and others. The geese were bar-headed (Anser indicus) whose head bars are a useful clue in field identification. There were nearly fifteen of them in company with a few pairs of Grey-lag Geese (Anser anser) whose relatively smaller build, stump-like pinkish bills, and waddling movement similar to that of domestic geese made their identification possible.

Birds of Prey: In mid-February a Pale Harrier (Circus macrourus) was seen atop a neem tree on the way to Shekha jheel. It eyed us calmly as we dismounted from our bikes and while my companion changed lenses in his camera. It flew away suddenly when at last the camera was ready to function.

In the fields we saw three pairs of Blackwinged Kites and also Pallas' Eagle, Tawny Eagle and Short-toed Eagle.

Miscellaneous: A party of about seven Stone Curlews (Burhinus oedienemus) was spotted by my companion at a rocky spot. At first they were hardly discernible among the stones and dry grass, so perfectly are they camouflaged but later on we picked their yellow legs, black-yellow bills and plover-like contours.

I also saw a solitary White Ibis (Threskiornis melanocephala) looking dirty and soggy and that was probably the only ibis in the area for we saw none other. Among the waders, 4-5 curlews, hundreds of snipes and sandpipers, redshanks and lapwings, were present in the marshes. In the tall grass on the borders of ponds and marshes, there were spoonbills, grey herons, purple moorhens and coots.

The checklist of birds by H. Abdulali and J.D. Panday indicate that some of the birds mentioned above are migratory and some are resident.

Harriers by S.K. Reeves

The Editor's feathers have recently been ruffled by the mis-identification of the Magpie Robin which appears on the cover of the Newsletter, so it is with the utmost trepidation that I question something which has been written.

He concludes his very interesting Note on Harriers on Page 11 of the 'April' issue of the Newsletter by saying "One of my cherished desires has been to locate the roosting tree of Harriers".

I fear his desire will remain unrequited, for almost without exception all Harriers of the genus Circus roost at night on the ground.

The only exception I can find is that the Handbook of the Birds of Europe the Middle East and North Africa states, in respect of the Pallid Harrier (Circus macrourus), that in Africa it rarely roosts in trees. Oddly enough, the paragraph on roosting commences by stating "Night roosts always situated on ground."

Apart from the above-mentioned somewhat dubious exception, this Handbook says in respect of the Marsh Harrier (Circus aeruginosus), the Hen Harrier (Circus cyaneus) and the Montagu's Harrier (Circus pygargus) that they always roost on the ground at night.

This assertion is supported by the Handbook of British Birds and the Handbook of the Birds of India and Pakistan.

The sort of habitats in which these Harriers roost is variously given in the literature as ploughed and fallow fields, grass, reeds, heather, short conifer plantations (sometimes with an undergrowth of heather), moorlands (dry and boggy) etc.

They commonly roost, especially in winter, in groups at favourite sites, the birds usually coming singly and often from far-off (8-10 kilometres) hunting grounds.

Some of the birds settle down for the night in 'forms' like those used by hares and partridges.

The winter of 1978/79 was an exceptionally good year for Hen Harriers on the North Norfolk coast. It was most enjoyable to sit in one's car, just before sunset, at the edge of one of the local commons, which was covered with heather and a few scattered bushes, and watch the Harriers coming in to roost.

One had to keep a very sharp look-out because the birds usually came in fast and very low and quite suddenly dropped into the Heather. Once they dropped down they were not seen again and no sounds were heard.

In conclusion, one might add that it is very unusual for Harriers to even perch in trees, that is in living trees. They will, of course, perch in the lower branches of dead trees. To find an example of a Harrier perching in a tree, the Handbook of British Birds was obliged to quote Jerdon.*

Harriers usually perch on the ground, mounds of earth, anti-hills, posts, stumps, low bushes, boulders etc.

*T.C. Jerdon, Surgeon-major Madras Army, author of 'The Birds of India' (Two volumes) 1862 - the standard work on Indian Ornithology until the arrival nearly forty years later of the four volumes on birds in the 'Fauna of British India' series by W.T. Blandford and Eugene W. Oates.

Reactions of the *Corvus splendens*, *Columba livia*, and *Passer domesticus* to preliminary monsoon showers by Aashbosh Pittie

When the very first shower of rain hesitantly fell on Hyderabad, we breathed a sigh of relief for the summer of 1980 was harsh indeed. I guess the crows (*Corvus splendens*) enjoyed the rains most of all the three. They would just sit out in the open and let the cool water flow over themselves and sometimes even open their wings to allow it to descend into the feathers there - the inner secondaries and the lesser wing coverts. Their caw caws were filled with pleasure. When the shower passed on, they gave a vigorous shake to their feathers, which removed all the extra water, and commenced the business of preening. Preening started with the wings. The oil was taken and spread on these feathers (the primaries, secondaries and the wing coverts). Then the tail feathers were cleaned. This shows that those feathers which are essential for flying are cleaned first. Only after these feathers were cleaned did the crows start on the others.

The *Columba livia* - being the tender birds they are - all collected on their roosts as soon as the preliminary drops fell. The garden where they had been feeding and the sky where they had been showing off their ability of flight, were cleared almost instantly and all the perches occupied. They sat huddled and with the feathers fluffed, to conserve heat. Only after the last drops had fallen and the clouds passed on, did they come alive and commence preening. They too preened their flying feathers first.

The *Passer domesticus* enjoyed the rain indirectly. As soon as the rain

started, they hid in hedgerows and when it passed away, came out to bathe in the little puddles of accumulated water on the garden soil. These sparrows generally enjoy a mud bath, therefore an occasional bath with water must be an exhilarating experience. They move their wings up and down and splash their bodies with the water. They also wet their throats and faces by dipping the beak and vigorously shaking it from side and side. When one sparrow emerges from a puddle, another jumps in. Quite often there are squabbles and sometimes a peaceful 'booline' is formed for a dip! The preening is commenced, again, with the flying feathers.

An unusual nest of a pair of Redwattled Lapwing by Prakash Gole and Taej Mundkur

The nest of a pair of redwattled lapwing (Vanellus indicus) is generally 'an unlined scrape on open fallow land or dry tank margin, sometimes bordered with gravel' (Dr. Salim Ali in Birds of Kerala). It is rather unusual to find a nest of redwattled lapwing in the midst of a city, not on terra firma but some 20 m above ground, on the terrace of a big building, albeit not far away from the banks of a river. The nest, a rather roundish platform of loose pebbles and small stones, about 25 cm. in diameter was constructed on the terrace-like roof-slab of a college-building in Poona. This broad roof-like terrace lacks parapet walls and as such no one is normally allowed to go on to the terrace. The birds are thus safe from human interference. Gravel and loose pebbles are spread over the terrace and the birds have taken advantage of this ready-at-hand material. The college-building is about 150 m from the Mutha river of Poona.

When the nest was located on 30th March it contained four eggs. One of the parents was incubating and the other kept a watch from a distance. There was also a third bird and when one of us tried to approach all the three were up in the air giving alarm calls. As we withdrew all the three birds returned to the terrace. If a crow was flying nearby all the three were seen to try to drive it away. But we also observed the parents occasionally trying to drive the third bird away. His presence was however, usually tolerated. Is it possible that this bird belonged to their previous brood?

On 6th April when we ascended the terrace once again, we found all the eggs gone and not even egg-shells could be found. But when we searched around we found four little grey-brown downy balls beautifully camouflaged and concealed among pebbles and gravel. The empty nest and the little ones were duly photographed. All the three birds were there accusing us with their famous 'did you do its'.

On a lower and smaller roof-terrace another lapwing-pair was seen frequently. They might have their nest there. But this terrace has no easy approach and hence could not be climbed.

Extracts from letters

I have now decided to start a BOYS CLUB. I want to organise some outings for groups of about 5 or 6 boys at a time if I take my car, otherwise if they go by bus I can handle a group of 15 or so. HOW AM I TO GO ABOUT CREATING INTEREST IN BIRDS, ANIMALS, and trees and flowers, and such things? Particularly birds? The other day I asked one little fellow what 'that' bird was, pointing towards a common myna, and he promptly replied 'kaki' meaning a crow!! Then I found out that most birds were just 'kakis'!! I am keen to get about it in the best way, and just thought when I saw your post card intimating your subscribers to the Newsletter for Birdwatchers that you've been out of station for two months, that you must have returned quite refreshed, and I may obtain from you some advice on how to go about making keen birdwatchers of these 'basti' boys who are such delightful youngsters.

Brigadier R. Lokarajan

Re. Sri Bipin Chandra Pande's note, appearing in the April issue of the Newsletter, I strongly disagree. While it is true that both the variety and quantity of Nainital's bird life has decreased in recent years, yet even a casual observer is impressed by its richness.

Many thickly wooded areas remain within the municipal limits of the town, and the amateur birder, starting early, can hope to see at least 25-30 different birds in the course of a few hours.

Akshoba Singh

Death of a Quail: On 22nd November 1979 while I was walking near an electric power house in Bangalore, I heard a familiar 'Plurr' of wings and looked in the direction of the sound to see a quail dart across the road from the power house towards a compound on the opposite side. Even before I realised what was happening the quail headed straight for an electric wire, dashed on to it with full force and crashed down. I ran to the spot to see a Grey Quail (Coturnix coturnix) lying quite dead. I turned over the bird to find its throat completely burnt out and the muscles covering the neck vertebrae were exposed.

I could not place the exact reason for this suicidal attempt of the quail. At that moment there was no traffic on the road and no one inside the power house compound to have alarmed the bird to take to wings.

I wonder if our readers have a similar incident to report or an explanation to offer?

S. Subramanya

ERRATA

In our notes on Owls and the Solar Eclipse in the April issue of the Newsletter the insertion 'lowest', in the second paragraph has been wrongly placed. It should have been in the first line of the third paragraph between the words 'their when', thus reading 'their lowest when..!'.
 Yado Mohan Rai

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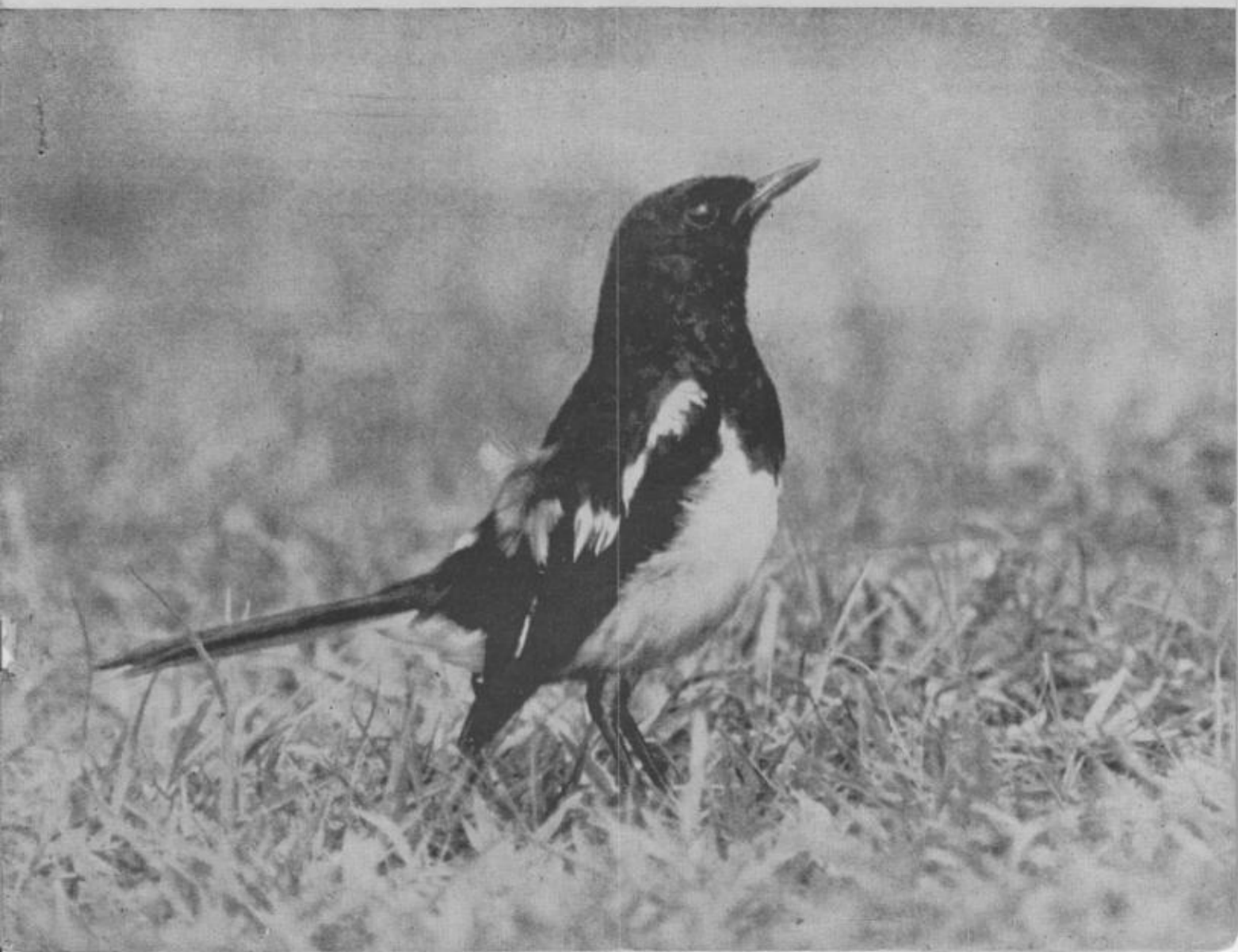
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Our Contributors

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EDITORIAL

The International Council for Bird Preservation Newsletter is now published from the ICBP, 219c Huntingdon Road, Cambridge CB3 0DL, England. Some of our Members may like to join the ICBP which is doing such good work all over the world for the preservation of endangered birds.

The Newsletter gives exciting news about the California Condor (Gymnogyps californianus). "For the first time in over three decades, scientists have observed the hatching of a California Condor in the wild. Biologists at the Condor Research Center in Ventura, California, say the chick hatched sometime before dawn on 14 May. In addition, during June a second nest with a chick was found in the coastal range; this chick is believed to be about two weeks older than the first one discovered." Biologists of the Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Audubon Society first spotted the egg from a telescope more than a quarter mile away between 15th and 16th March. Since its hatching, the adults have been very attentive to the young bird, with both taking turns feeding the chick.

One can only hope that the proposed captive breeding programme of this endangered species will be successful. I recall that there was considerable opposition among conservationists in the USA to this project when it was first mooted because of the added danger to a population of birds which had reached such a critical stage.

Abdul Moeed of the Ecology Division, Department of Scientific and Industrial Research, New Zealand, has sent an interesting reprint regarding the diet of adult and nestling starlings. Readers may recall that Abdul Moeed was in India on a project relating to Mynas. His objective was to assess whether there was any significant difference between the morphology of Mynas in various parts of India and those in New Zealand. In his paper Moeed reports that "Although the diets of nestling starlings and mynas overlapped considerably, Coleoptera, Lepidoptera, Dermaptera, and Isopoda were eaten more by starlings than by mynas, whereas Himiptera, Diptera, Odonata, Hymenoptera, spiders, and snails were eaten more by mynas than by starlings." If any of our readers are interested in the paper by Moeed please write to the Editor.

Prof. K.K. Neelakantan who is one of our most dependable birdwatchers is now engaged on a bird study project at Point Calimere and wishes to acquire a telescope or spotting scope (the latter preferably). He is willing to consider the purchase of the equipment provided the price is not too high. He will also welcome the loan for 8 months of such equipment and guarantees careful use and prompt return. If any reader is willing to help, would he kindly contact Prof. K.K. Neelakantan, Project Ecocrecce, Point Calimere, Kodikkarai P.O., Thanjavur District, 614807?

SR Shah writes to thank Lavkumar Khacher for identifying the bird he described in an earlier issue, as the Wall Creeper. He says the description in Vol.9 of the Handbook fits like a glove. The Handbook says "On vertical cliffs, climbs in jerky spurts, continually flicking its crimson wings and poking its long bill into small crannies for insects and spiders. Now and again will let go its hold and tumble through space to explore the scarp lower down or loop off and fly to another cliff, where active hunting is forth with resumed....Flight undecided and Hoopoe like.....with alternated flappings and pauses."

K Jude Sekar, IFS, AWPOI, Bhanjanagar, Orissa, was intrigued by the name Indian Roller for the Blue Jay. During the breeding season in February to March he found that they were very noisy "Making raucous calls and zig zag sorties giving the impression as if they were rolling through the air while flying. Thus, I thought, they earned their name as rollers." The surmise is correct.

V Santharam points out that KSR Krishna Raju in his interesting notes in the May 1980 issue has slipped up in referring to the spotted redshank as Tringa glareola. "Actually the spotted sandpiper is T. glareola whereas the spotted redshank is I. erythropus. As the latin name is used very often, it appears that the bird mentioned by Mr. Raju is the spotted sandpiper and not spotted redshank".

Referring to Shri. Indra Kumar Sharma's comments "On wasting 7 pages of the Newsletter in the March issue by writing an article which had little interest for him" Santharam says "Had I reduced the same article to about 'two pages I would not have been able to incorporate many details which I thought were important'. I had actually written it for the benefit for such persons who are actually interested in this particular aspect of bird study."

PS Thakker visited the mini Keoladev Ghana near Ahmedabad on 9th December 79 and again on 20-1-1980 with Mr. SR Shah. He reports siting Brahminy Duck, Pelicans, Darter, White Storks, Black Ibis, Nukta, Common Teal, Pintail, Sarus Crane and others. All these birds were in large numbers. On the 25th of May 80 he visited the area again with Mr. Manmohan Singh, from the Vikram A Sarabhai Community Science Centre. On this occasion they saw Flamingoes and Sarus Cranes. Apparently this is a valuable refuge for birds as can be seen from the fact that there were over a 100 numbers of the following species: Sarus Crane, Dabchick, Blackwinged Stilt, Little Egret, Cattle Egret, and Cormorant. There were 40-50 Pheasant-tailed Jacana and over 50 Flamingoes. There were also Gadwal, Wigeon, and Tufted Pochard.

T.V. Jose comments on the note by V. Santharam (Newsletter, May 1980) on the social and sexual behaviour of sparrows. He writes "Mr. Santharam's contention that Tinbergen's explanation is more satisfactory than that of Dr. Burton may be true; but this does not mean that Tinbergen's is not riddled with a number of loopholes.....we do not know what purpose hostilities towards females serve in wooing and courtship. We know for certain that fear, and the tendencies to escape, are diametrically opposite to sex desire and sex attraction. We also know that in animals, generally, during the mating season, the male has a non hostile attitude towards the opposite sex.....and a manifestly hostile attitude towards the same sex. If the opposite is the case in Blue Herons it would imply that a fighting propensity is a necessary genetic quality in the parents....."

A Brief Report of Birding in Nainital During Feb-March by Shashi Rai Singh and Akshobh Singh

The Himalayan lake town of Nainital has been a bird sanctuary for many decades. Because of the sudden elevation of the mountain range (peaking at 8600 ft. approx.) at the place where Nainital is situated, the existence of a large lake (altitude 6350 ft.), and the presence of different types of rocks and soils, the flora is very rich, accounting for the richness of Nainital's bird life.

Most of the observations recorded here were made on the Ayarpatta Hill, which faces north, and is more thickly wooded than the other hills of Nainital. The trees which deserve special mention are the Banj Oak (*Quercus incana*), the Moru Oak (*Quercus dilatata*), the Ayar (*Pieris ovalifolia*) after which the Ayarpatta hill takes its name, and the Burans or Rhododendron (*Rhododendron arboreum*). One of the charms of birding in this season is that this tree sized Rhododendron is in full bloom, covered with masses of bright red flowers, attracting animals and birds. Incidentally the Rhododendron flowers are also eaten by man. One is continuously enchanted by the view of the gleaming ranges of the Himalayas which are clearly seen during this season because the air has been scrubbed clean by the winter rains. Another bonus worth mentioning is the abundance of the nocturnal reddish coloured flying squirrels*, which emerge in the late evening, delighting one with their aerial acrobatics.

During the period under reference Nainital is host to a number of migrants. A delightful pair of Whitecapped Redstarts can be seen each year at this time living in a rocky crevice above the kitchen drain at Kashipur House. They can also be observed feeding on the food particles in the drain. Another Whitecapped Redstart and a pair of Plumbeous Redstarts live around the jetty of the Boat House Club. - - - - -

*These are perhaps the Orangebellied Himalayan Squirrel (*Dremomys lokriah*). Editor.

Yellowcheeked Tits, another migrant, usually in pairs, are rarer than the Greenbacked Tit, a permanent resident around most houses. The latter is not shy and one can get fairly close to it, while the former can only be seen from a distance, flitting from tree to tree. A group of 3 Redheaded Tits, common in summer, was seen in late March.

Hoopoes and Drongos, common in the plains, are seen here only at this time. We also observed a flight of Common House Crows which are normally never seen, our resident crow being the larger and bolder Jungle Crow.

Flocks of Scarlet Minivets with the yellow and grey coloured females following, form an arresting spectacle. These birds are residents. Occasionally one can see the Minivets form a hunting party with Verditer Flycatchers. The Verditer Flycatcher has a very restricted territory, while the Minivets are wanderers.

The Grayheaded Flycatcher is usually right on top of the pyramid of the hunting party. Another member, the Dark Grey Bushchat is the most common Bushchat here - it can always be seen around gardens. At 'Clifton' two males, usually fighting, can be observed, but no females are seen nearby, though they can be seen elsewhere. Tickel's Willow-Warbler, the Himalayan Tree Creeper, the White-eye are also around with the Streaked Laughing Thrushes forming the base of the pyramid of these mixed hunting parties. This thrush, easily tamed, is not at all shy, often venturing into verandas and close to humans to pick up food.

Eastern Grey Wagtails are fairly common. The Hodgson's Pied Wagtail was also seen. The Whitecheeked Bulbul seen in large parties at higher altitudes, is seen in pairs lower down. This bird allows humans to approach quite closely. The White-tailed Nuthatch is usually seen singly but seldom at this time. The Rufous-tailed Flycatcher can be seen at low spots on particular trees - the ones we saw preferred Rhododendron.

Some birds gave us only a very few sightings. One Redvented Bulbul was observed here for the first time ever by us at Hutton Cottage, and one more was seen later. The White-throated Fantail Flycatcher was seen at Clifton only once. One, and only one, beautiful male Indian Bluechat was seen by us late in the evening quite close to the main bazaar. One male Whitebrowed Blue Flycatcher was seen along with a group of sparrows, not in the least bit shy, and allowing us to approach very closely, sitting on the road. In typical flycatcher behaviour it would make quick sorties, always returning to its 'perch' on the ground. Another lone male was seen sitting in low undergrowth a few feet away from a group of workmen. The Collared Pygmy Owllet is another rare sight seen by us only once in a dense oak tree. Only one Great Himalayan Barbet was seen. These birds are quite vociferous and parties of 4-6 birds are common during the monsoon. The Chestnutheaded Bee-eaters were seen by us this year for the first time ever.

The Himalayan Green Finch is normally seen in parties of 4-6 birds sitting on wires and coming down to the ground to feed. We also observed one Greenfinch chase away a male Rosefinch from its feeding ground. A party of 3 Goldfronted Finches can also be regularly observed. Belying their spectacular name, they are dullish coloured birds with a bright reddish-gold patch on the head.

The Meadow Bunting is usually seen in parties of 4-6 birds. The Rufous Turtle Dove never seen by us in parties, but only singly or in pairs, is a fairly common sight. The Himalayan Pied Woodpecker is fairly common, and at this time is seen pecking at the Rhododendron blooms.

A raucous group of ten Whitecrested Kaleej Pheasant were seen in the highest part of the Ayarpatta, near a prominent picnic spot 'Tiffin Top'. One felt rather sorry to see them there, as they are noisy, slow, and rather 'silly' birds easy prey for the poacher, of whom unfortunately there are too many. Also seen near Tiffin Top were the Black Tit some of which almost came within touching distance as we stood motionless, a group of Black Throated Jays loudly advertising their presence, and four Blackheaded Sibias, flying from one brightly red blooming Rhododendron to another.

Lammergeiers are fairly common, and are usually seen singly, soaring majestically near the refuse dump outside the town, but they are rarely seen over the main valley itself.

Numerous other birds were seen by us, but as we could not make a positive identification, we shall avoid speculation and not mention them.

Last but not least, no report on birding in Nainital can ever be complete without due mention of that interesting, lively, perky songster, the ubiquitous Himalayan Whistling Thrush, locally named the 'Kalchunnia', seen singly or in pairs. Its long whistling song is heard every where and is one of the main charms of living in Nainital. It is the proverbial early bird, and is one of the first birds to begin calling in the morning even before first light. For the birder, it is wonderful to wake to the song of this thrush. Till approximately mid March it was not whistling at all, but thereafter it has been calling regularly, and pairs may be observed swiftly chasing each other, making a harsh and unpleasant sound quite different from its song. It is a permanent resident around most houses, and is definitely one of the most enjoyable birds for the ear as well as for the eye - a true birders' delight.

Orange-Headed Thrush - a brilliant mimic by Saumitra Banerjee

On the outskirts of Calcutta there still exist a few dilapidated properties primarily due to their location. One such is a derelict garden over grown and covered by weeds. It has a tremendous potential as a habitat for the local species of birds, and we earnestly hope that it acquires the status of a mini bird-sanctuary someday.

One summer morning I came across the brilliant Orange-Headed Thrush (*Zoothera citrina*) and got an opportunity to appreciate its imitating abilities. When I approached the area I was greeted with a polyphony of sounds consisting of the calls of many species such as the Golden Oriole, the Magpie Robin, the Tailor Bird, the Black Drongo and the Iora. All these were uttered in rapid succession and we were taken aback when we found that the sounds emerged from a single bird the eloquent *Citrina*. I had my tape recorder with me and the tape will be a prized possession all my life.

Ashycrowned Finch-Lark recorded feeding on Rice Grains by Aziz Banu and T.G. Manmohan Singh

A few samples of Ashycrowned Finch-Lark (*Eremoterix grisea*) trapped at Agricultural College Farm and Agricultural Research Institute, Rajendranagar (Hyderabad, Andhra Pradesh) were dissected for gut content analysis studies. This revealed the presence of rice in the gut of these birds. The rice grains were present either as complete or half grains or as triturerated* mass.

Although the Ashycrowned Finch-Lark is normally considered as a useful bird feeding on grass, weed seeds, ants, weevils and other insects (Salim Ali, 1972: Handbook of birds of India and Pakistan, Vol.5, p.10), the intake of rice grains as food, we feel deserves to be taken note of. Earlier to this, Shivanarayan (Newsletter for Birdwatchers, March 1978, Vol.XVIII (3) p.10) has reported Sorghum grain as a food item for this bird, which was recorded at Karimnagar district of Andhra Pradesh.

This observation of Finch-Lark feeding on rice grain however, does not categorise the bird as a pest of standing paddy crop since the bird is not recorded so far in the cropped area. The rice grains must have been fed by this bird from threshing yard as the Finch-Lark is generally a ground feeder.

It is therefore inferred that although essentially a useful bird feeding normally on its natural food (grass, weed seeds and insects), the Finch-Lark may be constrained to supplement its diet with cereals like sorghum and rice in cultivated areas, when its natural food items are not adequately available.

*Triturate means, to grind to a powder. Editor

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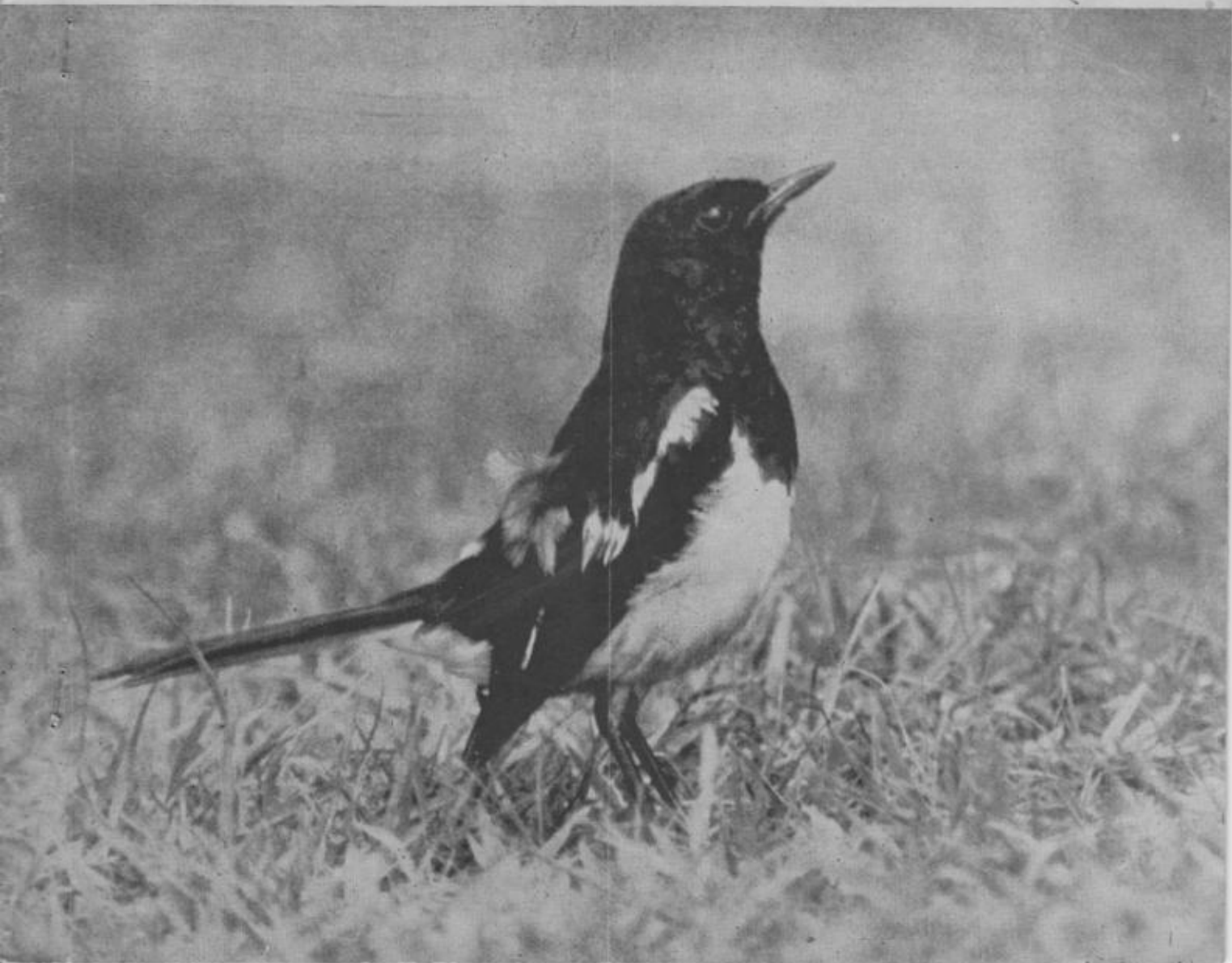
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Newsletter for Birdwatchers

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NEWSLETTER
FOR BIRDPWATCHERS
Vol. XX No. 8

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Editorial

The International Council for Bird Preservation: The new Director Christoph Inboden writes to say that Prakash Gole was the Indian delegate to the meeting of the Asian Continental Section in Thailand last year. We would like Gole to tell us something about the proceedings of the meeting.

Reproduced is a memorandum from Lavkumar Khacher, Chairman of the Pheasant Working Group of the ICBP.

I had been in Manali, Himachal Pradesh for May and June, and have just returned to my mail, long unattended to. I had hoped to find responses to the World Strategy on Pheasants which Mr. Roger Pasquier had very kindly circulated to you all. Unfortunately, you all have been very busy and there has been nothing! It is absolutely urgent that we know what priorities we wish to indicate so that we might ask for funding. This information was indeed, to be sent to IUCN by 25th July. In the absence of any indications from any of you, I am indicating the following action areas which should have IUCN's backing:

1. Manning surveys during the next three years in the Nepal, and Bhutan Himalayas with a view to produce a report on the pheasant populations and viable habitats. \$10,000
2. Manning surveys under WWF-India and Bombay Natural History Society programmes in the Indian Himalayas with the same objectives. \$15,000
3. Convening a meeting of pheasant experts in Malaysia or Indonesia to highlight the need for action to save tropical pheasants. Meeting in late 1980 or early 1981. \$5,000

In Manali I missed meeting Dr. Tony Gaston who had been surveying the area for pheasants. He has, I believe, had a very successful programme and apart from confirming the existence of the Western Tragopan, he wrote to inform me that there is some excellent country east of Kulu where he saw more Monal than anywhere else -- this close to an area populated by avid hunters!

In a small village close to Manali I came across a peasant family that has reared a Monal chick which took shelter in their yard one harsh winter day some seven years ago. It is now most resplendent, a joy to behold. Of course, keeping this bird has placed the family on the wrong side of law and I am trying to get a special license issued to them to keep their bird. That Monals are easy to keep in captivity is well known, but this bird proves it beyond any doubts and I have been wondering whether it might not be a very powerful method to have a Monal farm set up at Manali and another at Pahalgam or Gulmarg in Kashmir where thousands of tourists can see the beautiful birds. These display centers would help us to focus the need for conservation of pheasant more than any other action. Your comments would be welcome.

Bee-eaters: Bee-eaters are very much in my mind now because of a recent development in our garden. We have put up two steel arches with cross bars and these bars have become the favourite perches of green bee-eaters. Presumably perching facilities are an important factor in the concentration of birds in certain areas within their preordained localities. I recall that in earlier times stakes were thrust into paddy fields to act as a perch for the Black Drongo. Black Drongos were encouraged to reside in paddy fields because they eat flying insects destructive to paddy.

On looking through the pictorial encyclopaedia of birds published by Hamlyn I was reminded that there are 25 species of bee-eaters in the world belonging to the Family Meropidae. The Synopsis of the Birds of Indian and Pakistan indicates that there are 5 species in India.

Looking to the distribution of the 5 species in India I note that the Chestnutheaded Bee-eater (*Merops leschenaulti*) has been recorded from Madras only once. Have there been any recent sightings? and what is the position in the Eastern Ghats. Perhaps Mr.V. Santharam, Mr. S.T. Baskaran and Mr. KSR Krishna Raju can furnish some information.

Bee-eaters incidentally are included within the Order Coraciiformes. This Order includes kingfishers, rollers, hoopoes, and hornbills. A bee-eater in looks and habits seems far removed from a hornbill but obviously there is some similarity in their morphology which scientists concerned with evolution have been able to discern. In our garden we have bee-eaters, rollers, whitebreasted kingfishers, and hoopoes, so virtually the whole Order of Coraciiformes is covered. I must now look out for a hornbill.

Kalyani Dam Area: V Santharam writes to say that the Kalyani Dam Area is being considered for designation as a sanctuary by the Andhra Pradesh Government. The article in this issue is being sent to the CCF, AP and some of our members may like to motivate the AP administration suitably.

Bird check lists for tourists: Shri.S.K. Misra, IAS, who has recently assumed charge as Chairman of India Tourism Development Corporation is a keen bird man and as Chief Secretary in the Haryana Government was responsible for the preservation of the Sultanpur Jheel. He was also the moving spirit behind the setting up of "Bird" restaurants at selective sites in Haryana. During his recent visit to Bangalore I discussed the possibility of publishing check lists of birds for tourists and Misra appreciated the idea. Can our Members get going on this? Let us make a start with lists of birds both resident and migrant seen in our major tourist areas like Agra, Delhi, Jaipur, Bombay, Pune, Ahmedabad, Calcutta, Bangalore, Mysore, Doty and Srinagar. We can cover more areas in course of time. Will those of you who can produce such lists for specific areas please write to me? I will take it up with the ITDC after hearing from you.

Incidentally I had a pleasant surprise visit from Dr.P.T. Thomas last evening (1st September). He has offered to produce a list for Mandu.

*(*Pluvialis squatarola*)

Presence of Grey Plover* in Dodda Gubbi: On 1st September Dr. PT Thomas and myself noticed a solitary plover on the shores of the Dodda Gubbi tank. From the distribution map of the species Handbook, Vol.2 page 220 Bangalore does not appear to be within its range. Or am I mistaken?

Birding in Kalyani Dam Area (Chittoor District, Andhra Pradesh) by V. Santharam

The Kalyani Dam, which lies in the Chamala Valley area is only about 12 miles from the Tirupathi Town on the Pileru - Bhakavapet Road and all buses going to these places pass through the Kalyani Dam. The bus stops on the main road just a kilometer from the dam site. A pucca road runs to the dam. The inspection bungalow is perched on a hillock on the western side of the reservoir. The range of hills enclose the reservoir and the sight is fascinating from the inspection bungalow. The bungalow (which has two bed rooms, a dining hall and a kitchen of which one room is reserved for the officials) can be rented for Rs.6/- per day. The facilities include twin beds, attached bathroom and dressing room, adequate pieces of furniture, electric fan and lights. The bungalow is modern, cosy and comfortable. Although no hotels or shops are found in the vicinity, food can be arranged through the watchman-cum-cook whose house is right behind the bungalow. He cooks even non-vegetarian dishes. (A precaution: Beware of the "Special Chutney" made exclusively out of green chillies!) The I.B. can be booked at Tirupathi itself. The office is situated on the way to Tirumala Hill.

The environs of the dam is hilly and there is a good amount of vegetation - ranging from dry scrub to denser and more wooded areas. There are certain areas that are rocky. Lantana is invading the scrub area and at many places this shrub dominates. When we had visited this place in the last week of January 1980, most of the lantana were in fruit. The reservoir had plenty of water, though some of the streams were dried up. There are very good tracks leading into the interior of the valley and a birdwatcher is certainly rewarded during his walks along these. There is a place known as Pulibonu, about 6 miles walk from the I.B. It has been mentioned often in the books of the well-known **shikari Kenneth Anderson**. There is nothing but a well and a camping platform. The Kalyani River is flowing close to this spot. The area is said to be inhabited by several species of mammals (though we never came across any during our 3-day sojourn). Some of these are: Panther, Bear, Sambar, Barking Deer, Boar, Langur, Wild Dog, Jackal, Hares, Mongooses etc.

Regular poaching is said to be going on here and one night we could follow a hunting party on a motor vehicle on the opposite hill from the bungalow. Grazing and wood cutting is very much prevalent. It would be a good thing if the Chamala Valley as a whole is protected and made a game sanctuary.

Certainly it could become one of the best wildlife spots of the south if protected and undisturbed. The place is also ideal for camping, trekking and photography. We heard that the Andhra Pradesh Government is proposing this as a wild-life sanctuary. I sincerely hope they would do this as early as possible and wish all the nature lovers and enthusiasts would support the cause, especially our friends in Andhra Pradesh.

A LIST OF BIRDS SEEN BETWEEN 25th AND 27th JANUARY 80

Sl.No.	Family	Species	Remarks
1.	Podicipedidae	Little Grebe	Fairly common.
2.	Phalacrocoracidae	Darter	A solitary bird seen on all three days on a partly submerged branch in the dam.
3.	Ardeidae	Grey Heron	Solitary bird on 2nd and 3rd day, mainly in flight.
4.	"	Pond Heron	Common
5.	"	Little Egret	1 bird on 1st day.
6.	"	Yellow Bittern	Solitary bird on the 1st day on the partly submerged branches.
7.	Anatidae	Lesser whistling teal	A few pairs seen on 1st day.
8.	"	Spotbill or Grey Duck	Common
9.	Accipitridae	Pariah Kite	Common
10.	"	Shikra	1 - 2
11.	"	Tawny Eagle	1 - 2 birds on 2nd day.
12.	"	Marsh Harrier	A fine male specimen with silver-grey and brown plumage gliding over the water.
13.	"	Short-toed Eagle	1 bird seen in flight.
14.	Falconidae	Shahin Falcon	A beautiful specimen on a tree behind the I.B. sitting on a branch and preening. Suddenly it flew out across the reservoir attempting to catch red-rumped swallows in an half-hearted manner and again returning to the same spot.

Sl.No.	Family	Species	Remarks
15.	Phasianidae	Grey Partridge	Common, very vocal.
16.	"	Jungle Bush Quail	2-3 birds seen under bushes. Flew suddenly on seeing us.
17.	"	Grey Jungle Fowl	Commonly heard
18.	"	Common Peafowl	4-5 birds, all pea-hen crossed our path en-route to Pulibonu, Seldom heard.
19.	Rallidae	Whitebreasted Waterhen	2-3 birds
20.	"	Indian Moorhen	Fairly common.
21.	Charadriidae	Redwattled Lapwing	Common. Agitated very much by our presence. Could it be nesting so early?
22.	Columbidae	Blue-Rock Pigeon	Fairly common.
23.	"	Spotted Dove	Seen & heard.
24.	Psittacidae	Roseringed Parakeet	Common
25.	"	Blossomheaded Parakeet	Common, moved about in small parties.
26.	Cuculidae	Kool	Common
27.	"	Small Greenbilled Malkoha	Common
28.	"	Crow-Pheasant	Common
29.	Apodidae	House Swift	Fairly common.
30.	Alcedinidae	Pied Kingfisher (Ceryle rudis)	Fairly common.
31.	"	Common or Small Blue Kingfisher	Fairly common.
32.	"	Whitebreasted Kingfisher	Common
33.	Meropidae	Small Green Bee-eater	Common
34.	Capitonidae	Green Barbet (Large or small?)	Only heard from the trees on the hill top.
35.	"	Coppersmith or Crimsonbreasted Barbet	Common
36.	Pittidae	Indian Pitta	1 bird on 2nd day flew when approached.

Sl.No.	Family	Species	Remarks
37.	Hirundinidae	Dusky Crag Martin (Hirundo concolor)	Fairly common near the dam site.
38.	"	Redrumped Swallow	Fairly common in the vicinity of the re- servoir (surprisingly the common swallow, Hirundo rustica seen in large numbers in Tirupathi was not seen here)
39.	Laniidae	Bay-backed Shrike	1-2 on the last day near the main road.
40.	Oriolidae	Golden Oriole	2 birds in flight on 2nd day.
41.	Dicruridae	Black Drongo	Fairly common.
42.	Oriolidae	Blackheaded Oriole	1 bird on 2nd day.
43.	Dicruridae	Whitebellied Drongo	Common in the jungle, in fact commoner than black drongo. Usually solitary.
44.	Sturnidae	Common Mynah	Common.
45.	Corvidae	Indian Tree Pie	Common.
46.	Campephagidae	Small Minivet	Fairly common.
47.	Irenidae	Common Iora	Common.
48.	"	Goldfronted Chloropsis	Fairly common on 2nd day.
49.	Pycnonotidae	Redwhiskered Bulbul	All the three species of bulbuls were very common here. They were so common that never a moment passed without seeing them or hearing them. Many bulbuls were seen feeding on the lantana berries.
50.	"	Redvented Bulbul	
51.	"	Whitebrowed Bulbul	
52.	Muscicapidae	Yelloweyed Babbler	2-3 birds seen on 1st day and 1-2 on final day.
53.	"	Jungle Babbler	Common.
54.	"	Tickell's Blue Flycatcher	1 bird seen on 2nd day.

Sl.No.	Family	Species	Remarks
55.	Muscicapidae	Whitebrowed Fantail Flycatcher	Fairly common, seems to be quite unafraid and gave good views.
56.	"	Jungle Wren-warbler(?)	2-3 birds seen near I.B. on shrubs.
57.	"	Tailor Bird	Common.
58.	"	Blyth's Reed Warbler	Common, heard often.
59.	"	Lesser Whitethroat	1 bird seen.
60.	"	Greenish Warbler	Common but not as much as Blyth's Reed Warbler.
61.	"	Magpie Robin	Common
62.	"	Black Redstart (?)	Female seen on last day.
63.	"	Indian Robin	Red on tail conspicuous. Common
64.	Motacillidae	Yellow Wagtail	1 bird seen on the 1st day flying in the evening.
65.	"	Large Pied Wagtail	Common.
66.	Dicaeidae	Tickell's Flowerpecker	Common, more often heard than seen.
67.	Nectariniidae	Purple sunbird	Common
68.	"	Purplorumped Sunbird	Common
69.	Placidae	Whitethroated Munia	Seen on 1st & 2nd day. 1-2 birds on 2nd day seen half-way up the track to Pulibonu. Were collecting nesting material.
70.	"	Spotted Munia	A small flock seen on 1st day evening drinking at the water's edge just at the time of sunset

This is not a complete list. A number of birds escaped our observation. Some birds recorded by our friends at a later date include yellow-wattled lapwing, brahmyn kite, cormorant and paradise flycatcher.

Also we could not identify a bigger version of the palm swift, with brown throat and upper parts and white belly with a long forked tail (Possibly the Alpine Swift. Editor).

Two discoveries by Y.M. Rai

Hastinapur has been a very important ecological niche here with small belts of planted forest now having acquired a natural character with tall trees, shrubs and grasses. There are vast marshlands here with a different flora. The place has been important for me for the various species of birds (more than 200) observed here, some among them being North Indian Crested Goshawk, Indian Brown Hawk Owl, Jungle Myna, Finn's Baya and Pigmy Woodpecker, birds not reported from Delhi which is not far from here.

Recently there have been two major discoveries of birds in this region of Hastinapur marshland here.

(a) Whitetailed Bushchat (*Saxicola leucura*). The bird was first noticed by me on 10th June '80. It had very small patch of rufous (size of a new paisa) on the throat and in flight the tail looked white. It was a single pair of male and female. As I made no further exploration in the gruelling heat of humid, stifling marshland, the decision of identity was deferred till further observation. The number of migrant Collared Bushchats suddenly increase in March-April as they congregate on their migration back, hence it was doubted that the bird might have been the Collared Bushchat that preferred to stay here in summer for some unknown reason. Further explorations were made during May to July 1980 and several pairs in different parts were discovered. The bird is territorial. Five pair at five different places were observed in June-July 80, some along with juveniles. One pair had three juveniles and another two. The adult male in monsoon months (June, July) had rufous of breast spreading all over the breast and approaching the belly. The rufous feathers had white middle. Some adult males showed white tail but some others had central tail feathers black and outer ones white. The females had grey flanks as had the juveniles. The juveniles were invariably in female brown plumage, but some had full rufous breast (probably males), with no black anywhere. One specimen of adult male Bushchat was collected in July 1980. The examination of tail feathers revealed that it conformed to the description of *Pratincola leucura* (Now known as *Saxicola leucura*) in Baker's Fauna of British India Vol.II Page 63. The measurements of the specimen were as follows:

Length 13 cm

Wings 70mm Beak (From skull) 15mm Gape 16mm Culmen 9mm Tail 52mm
Tarsus 22mm

This find conclusively proves the existence and distribution of Whitetailed Bushchat to this region of Hastinapur which is situated in riverian tract of the river Ganga with extensive patches of Marshland having the vegetation of typha and other grasses.

(b) There is another beautiful warbler resident in the marshes here that eluded identification till June 80. Its call recorded during the recording of the call of Striated Marsh Warbler in March 1978 was intriguing. Now further observation of the bird in the marshes revealed that the beautiful warbler is Yellowbellied Prinia or Wren Warbler (*Prinia flaviventris*), and its call 'Chair' can be heard throughout the grass overgrown marshes here. This also extends the distribution of this bird to this region of Hastinapur, 30 km. (Crows flight from Meerut.

Both the birds are not indicated in this region in the Handbook.

Saving a Lapwing by Indra Kumar Sharma

On 16th July 1980 I saw a dog running to safety with a redwattled lapwing in its mouth. Obviously it wanted to reach a safe place so that it could eat in peace undisturbed. A pair of lapwings obviously the parents were diving on the dog. To save the lapwing I hurled a stone at the dog and fortunately it dropped the bird on the ground. I was surprised to find that the lapwing which was a grown up young was alive and there were no external signs of injury. In fact it stood up and ran into a thicket nearby. The dog again came to recapture the bird but by pelting stones at it I drove it away.

The incident is interesting as it shows that a predator holds the prey lightly in its mouth. Perhaps the bird feigned death so that the dog did not make any special attempt to kill it.

Refugees in my Garden by Indira Kohli

Last summer the orchard adjacent to my house was felled to make room for a housing colony, with a consequent influx of birds into my garden.

A weaver bird has woven a nest in a thorny hedge surrounding the vegetable garden and babblers have built their nests in a high hedge screening the manure pit in the same area. But most interesting of all has been the arrival of four pied crested cuckoos which have obviously been attracted by babbler nesting. All summer long they have wheeled and tumbled about each other from tree to tree in my garden. They are truly the funniest, liveliest, and the most happy-go-lucky birds I have ever seen. Their song is very musical, clear and penetrating. They are the only birds I have seen regularly resting on the boughs of eucalyptus trees.

Two white breasted water hens have fled from the felled orchard to my neighbour's garden. They have nested in the hedge near a water tank, but I am delighted to find that they frequently run into my garden in search of food. They are very timid birds and take fright at the slightest disturbance. The water hens are a marked contrast to the pied crested cuckoos. The former are sleek, tidy, distinctly marked birds that literally skulk around my garden, while the pied crested cuckoos are ruffled, untidy, totally arboreal birds that don't care a hoot for my presence and mock at me from my trees whenever I walk in my garden.

Bird Watching at Shelaj by Udayan Mehta

Readers will you please stretch back to February 1980 when Mr.S.R. Shah wrote in this newsletter about Thor Lake? He compared it with that of Ghana Keoladev. One of our active members of Drongo Nature Club, Prof.P.T. Patel, visited this place in the end of June 80, he observed flamingoes, cormorants, egrets, storks, pelicans, spoonbills, ibis, jacanas, and many more water birds. This lake is a huge reservoir of food in Central Gujarat. There are no trees surrounding this area. Birds, therefore fly, more than 50 kms. in all directions for roosting.

Some of them - little egrets, cattle egrets, painted storks, openbilled storks, white ibis, black ibis, pond herons, fly eastwards from Thor to Shelaj, at a distant of 25 kms. They roost on an island in lake near Shelaj, which is 12 kms west of Ahmedabad, (between Thor and Ahmedabad). They fly early in the morning in search of food and return back to Shelaj after 4 p.m. Out of dozen accacia trees only two remain. Even then these birds have not deserted the island. Gujarat Government can develop this place into a fine birding place.

My recent visit alongwith my members was on 12th July, 1980. Before we reached there at 4 p.m., we walked around and observed green bee-eaters, drongoes, cuckoo shrike, dabchicks, waterhens, (whitebreasted) R.W. Lapwings, bay birds, tailor birds, swifts and many other local birds.

Polican all alone! by P.S. Thakker

I visited the mini Keoladev Ghana in the last week of June. Other members were Shri. P.T. Patel, Lecturer in Zoology, M.G. Science Institute, Ahmedabad, Master Anil Thakker, student of sixth standard and Miss Goeta Patel, student of commerce.

This time our route was different. We went to Thol village where we received a warm welcome from four-five black ibises who were - circling over our heads and were crying cheerfully.

Excitingly we saw a big white bird in the village tank. There was little water surrounding an island, on which there were two-to-three trees. The bird was in the water, swimming in a semi-circle. All of us were confused for sometime whether it was a donkey or bird? Unfortunately we did not have even a single binocular with us.

In utter confusion we left the place for visiting the mini Keoladev Ghana Sanctuary, as all the other members were visiting the place for the first time. Moreover it was a rainy day. But we were enough lucky as the rain started after we left the place.

Again we came back to the village for boarding the bus, we went near the tank and tried to identify the bird. After sometime we could identify and it was a Polican. The bird was injured on one of its wings and was unable to fly. I saw Pelicans during my earlier visit with Shri.S.R. Shah in the mini Keoladev Ghana which is two km. from here; from where the bird came in village tank according to the villagers.

We asked the villagers and came to know that the bird was there in the tank for about last two years and they were looking after the bird and the bird was safe from the hunters.

We also saw openbilled storks, painted storks, black and white ibis, grey herons at Shilaj village which is 12 km. away from Ahmedabad, while returning to home.

CorrespondenceA Postscript by A.P. Gupte

In the December, 1978 issue of the Newsletter we (four of us) had reported parasitizing of the nests of Rufousbacked Shrikes by Common Cuckoos in Hoshangabad (M.P.).

Shri. Lavkumar had, in 'Comments' (Newsletter - February, 1979), rightly said, "this record would have been 'authentic' had the observers captured the young cuckoo and sent it to the Bombay Natural History Society".

I had to wait till the next breeding season of the cuckoo to fill this lacuna in our observations. In August, 1979 I came across two cuckoo chicks badly injured by crows. My efforts to save them having failed, I sent one bird to the BNHS for identification. It was confirmed to be a juvenile Common Cuckoo (*Cuculus canorus*).

It appears that the cuckoos started coming to the Hoshangabad area for breeding since 1978, the year we observed and reported this phenomenon. Since then they have been coming regularly every year. They appear in the beginning of May and are readily recognized by their typical call. Their breeding period (June and July) coincides with that of their hosts, the Rufousbacked Shrikes. The eggs usually hatch in July and the grown-up chicks come out of the nests in early August. These chicks, which are much bigger than their foster parents, keep following the latter and persistently calling for food. The older cuckoos leave the area around this time. At the time of this writing (August 20) at least three pairs of shrikes are toiling away, feeding young cuckoos in my locality alone.

Editorial Note: Regarding the breeding of this cuckoo the Handbook Vol.3 page 206 says "Brood-parasitic, reportedly in the main on the drongos *Dicrurus adsimilis* and *D. leucophaeus*. Other species in whose nests putative eggs of this cuckoo are claimed to have been found, or which have been observed feeding its young, are Paradise Flycatcher (*Terpsiphone paradisi*), Streaked Spiderhunter (*Arachnothera magna*), and Ceylon Blackheaded Oriole (*Oriolus x. ceylonensis*). However, the available data on the breeding biology of this and other parasitic cuckoos in India are, by and large, meagre, and of dubious authenticity. Most accounts are vague, largely conjectural and often contradictory. The whole subject calls for a more methodical de novo re-investigation. Oviduct eggs from females of this species are reported as of two types: (1) whitish with reddish brown stippling closely matching drongos' eggs, and (2) pale grayish blue, resembling the eggs of some of the Turdinae. They measure c. 25 X 19 mm.

In Amurland (USSR) whence we possess fuller information, the principal fosterer is the Amur Brown Shrike (*Lanius cristatus confusus* Stegmann) whose eggs closely match those of this cuckoo. The incubation period of the cuckoo's eggs is c. 12 days, i.e. 2 or 3 days shorter than the shrikes'. (For an excellent recent account and details see Neufeldt, I, 1966, 'Life History of the Indian Cuckoo (*Cuculus micropterus micropterus* Gould) in the Soviet Union', IBNHS 63: 399-419.)"

Review

Birds of Prey by Gareth Parry and Rory Putman. Simon and Schuster.
\$30/- 118 pp. Birds of Prey by Glenys & Derek Lloyd Hamlyn - 95p 157pp
by Laeeq Futehally

These 2 books share an identical title, and the same high standard of excellence. Apart from that, they are very different in size, shape, appearance, feel and price. We will begin, as is always suitable, with the more expensive commodity.

The *Birds of Prey* by Gareth Parry and Rory Putman is really a coffee table affair, conceived as a vehicle to display the paintings of Gareth Parry. Gareth Parry is an artist ornithologist. The 35 paintings of birds of prey were specially commissioned for this book and it took the artist four years to do them. "The background of the subject is very important to me," he says in the Foreword. "Each painting has to tell a story, and the background is a vital part of that story - time of year, habitat, the prey and feeding habits and the light which can affect the colours...."

This book, then, is constructed around 35 magnificent paintings. The paintings include mostly those eagles, hawks and falcons and the owls which are found in the British Isles although a few belong to the US. That Mr. Parry's knowledge of natural history, as well as his draughtsmanship is of the highest order is proved anew in each plate. He always places his birds in a characteristic position in the foreground on a branch, at its nest or on a rock cliff, sometimes with its prey. Every hair of the feathers, every blade of grass, is painted in with loving precision; and, as we meet the intimidating eye of his "sitter" gazing at us from the pages, we feel we know a great deal about the bird. Facing each plate is a description of the field characteristics and habits of the species written by Rory Putman. This page is always enlivened either by photography or line engravings of the same species, often by Thomas Bewick.

In his Introduction, Putman gives a birds eye view, or perhaps a hawks eye view, of the families represented, their general biology and characteristics. He ends by giving the Conservation position of the raptors - he describes the rehabilitation successes or failures of those raptors which were decimated or wiped out in the 50's by DDT and other insecticides, as well as those whose populations were reduced by misguided game keepers at the turn of the century.

A section on Habitats and Distribution includes maps showing the ranges of the common species. The Marsh Harrier is shown as breeding throughout India, (*Circus aeruginosus*). Surely this is a mistake? Or is it that what they call Marsh Harrier has another name for us?

The second *Birds of Prey* also has coloured pictures on every page, although it is a modest paperback. Like all the excellent Hamlyn all-colour paperbacks, it is meant to be learnt from, rather merely looked at. Here too, perhaps the best way to describe the book is to quote from the Foreword. It...."...lists all the birds of prey & owls existing in the world today, with brief details of the hunting and nesting of the better known and more spectacular kinds....it is intended primarily for the layman with an interest in birds.....However the serious ornithologist may also find it

useful as some chapters - such as those on food requirements and the reasons for size differences between the sexes in some species - contain original work and discuss new ideas". The authors have done a very complete job in the brief span of 157 small pages; they have included a chapter on Keeping Birds of Prey, and suggested a list of Books to read and places to visit (in Britain).

The back cover tells us that Glenys and Derek Lloyd are pen names, covering the identities of Ornithologists who have specialized in studying birds of prey for many years, both in captivity as well as in the field across the world, which involved trips to East Africa, the Himalayas, the more remote parts of Europe, Iceland and Lapland. One cannot help being curious about the identities of the authors.

One interesting fact about the two books which have been reviewed is that the first was printed in Italy, and the second in Spain.

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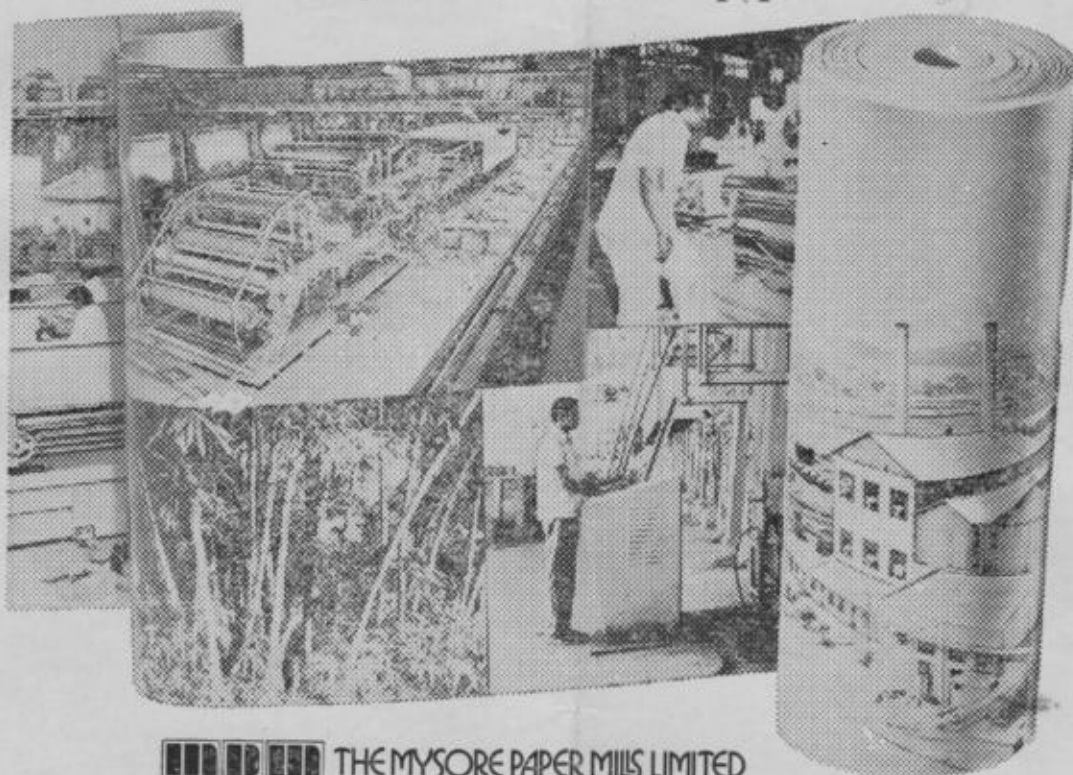
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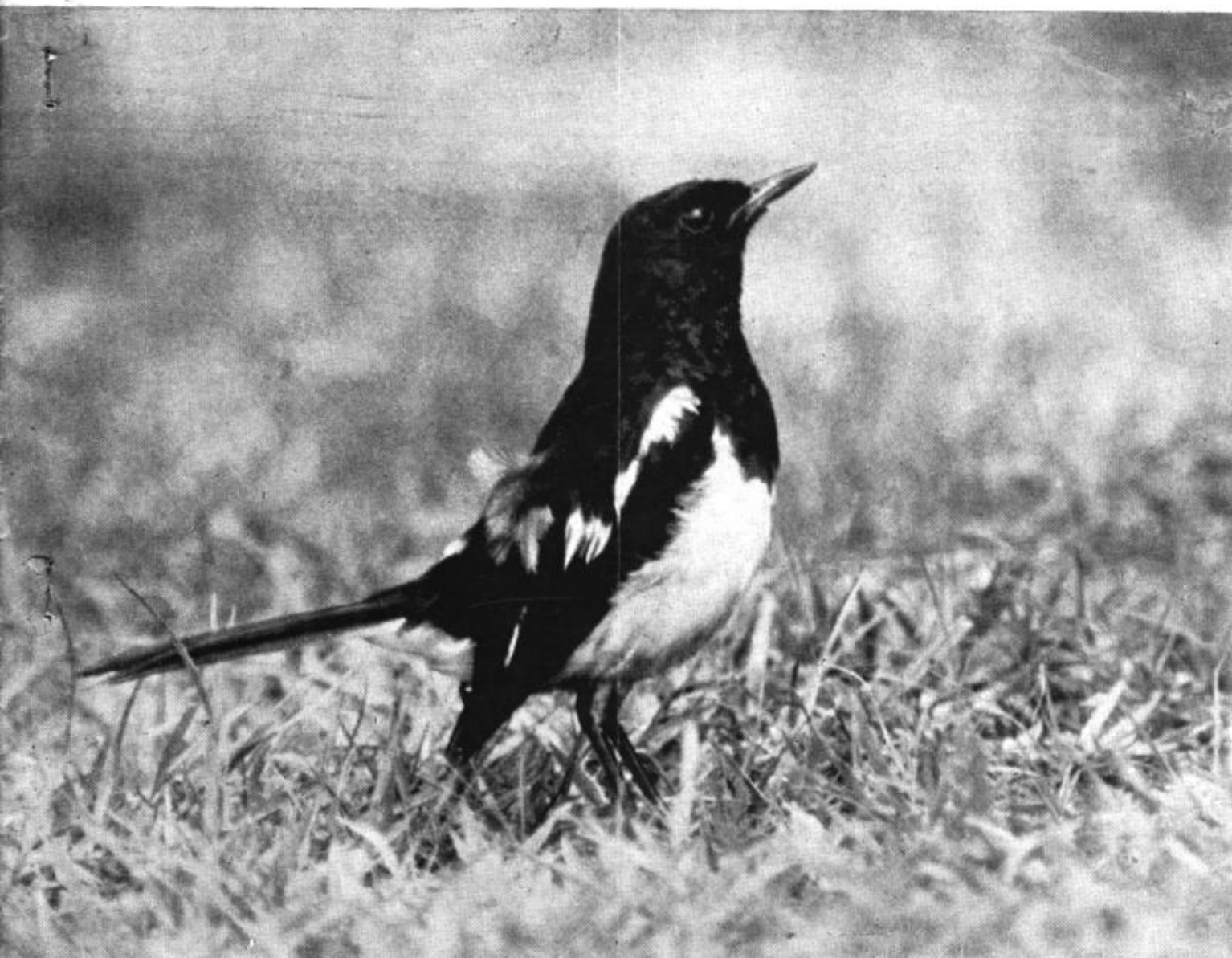
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Cover Picture: Magpie Robbin (*Copsychus saularis*)

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Newsletter for Birdwatchers

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NEWSLETTER
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Editorial

Binoculars instead of telephoto: Prakash Garde carried out an interesting experiment in photography by combining his camera and binocular. He did not have a telephoto lens, so he thought of attaching his binoculars to the camera. He had to unscrew the cone of the objective lens of the binocular almost to the last thread, but he did succeed in getting a fairly good picture of a Coppersmith.

Project on Mynas: I had written to Abdul Moeed (Ecology Division, DSIR, Private Bag, Lower Hutt, New Zealand) regarding the progress of his project on mynas and enquiring if similar work could be done in India. Here is what he says, and perhaps Dr's Asha Chandola, Madhav Gadgil or Aziz Banu may be interested in pursuing this.

" Possible Title Evolutionary considerations of food selection by Sturnids/some passerines in Bangalore/Karnataka/India. (OR only Common Myna).

Object To determine the diet and the extent of overlap in food selection and niche utilization by X number of Sturnids/passerines in relation to available food resource. (The measure of available food resource may be time consuming and tedious, but some index of it would be invaluable in explaining the results).

Background It is known that small size is associated with hot humid conditions, larger size with cooler or drier conditions. Variation in size in common myna in India conforms only approximately with this generalization.

Large common mynas are found at elevated localities with cooler, less humid climates (Dehra Dun, Bangalore), but so are small birds (Hyderabad). Small birds are found at low altitudes with hot humid climates (Calcutta, Trivandrum) and so are large birds (Bombay).

Other hypotheses have been advanced to explain geographic variation in body size in homeotherms. One is that body size in geographically variable mammalian carnivores and granivores is determined by latitudinal gradients in food particle size availability and interspecific competition. Interspecific competition for food therefore can be reduced by maximizing size differences among coexisting species at localities.

Common mynas often occur in large feeding flocks in intensively cultivated regions of India. These flocks commonly include or overlap with similar aggregations of one or more species of birds, particularly Starlings, Pied Mynas, Rosy Pastors, Bank Mynas, Jungle Mynas, and House Crows. These species compete for common food resources (particularly insects) along a variable geographical gradient because of their differential distributions and abundance in India. Hence at least part of the body size variation in Indian common mynas could derive from geographic variation in interspecific competition and food particle size.

It is emphasized that the hypotheses seeking to explain geographic trends in body size variation by either climatic adaptation or interspecific competition are not mutually exclusive. It seems likely that both of these factors operate as selective pressures for the evolution of optimal body size at a locality, and the task for the future is to unravel their relative contributions. (This is extracted from a paper by Baker and Moeed accepted for publication in the December issue of "Bijdragen tot de Dierkunde (Amsterdam)" and entitled Morphometric variation in Indian samples of the Common Myna, Acridotheres tristis (Aves: Sturnidae))

Methods Around 15 birds of each species every month for 12-14 months will be desirable for identification of food eaten. The sample size will of course depend on the diversity of food eaten but perhaps more so on the ease of collection. More the better.

The stomach contents should be preserved as soon as possible for later examination under a stereomicroscope to determine the contents. Sex of the birds is to be noted for determining possible differences in food eaten.

Measurement of the size of prey (length/volume) so that possible nutritive gains can be extrapolated.

Measurements of the bill components (length, width, height) and the size of the birds would be advantageous when explaining the differences in food selection among species.

Knowledge of breeding strategy (= timing of breeding) would be useful to evaluate the extent of competition among species both for food and nesting sites."

Jatinga Mystery: Hari Prasad Patnaik has sent an interesting cutting from the Amrita Bazar Patrika of 16-9-1980 in connection with the Jatinga Mystery. The report reads "This mysterious phenomenon of birds being lured by artificial light was unknown to avian biologists until it was first reported in September 1979 by Dr. Sudhin Sengupta working at the animal behaviour division of the Zoological Survey of India in Calcutta.

Dr. Sengupta is planning another expedition to Jatinga to verify some of his theories on the avian harakiri. In earlier visits he found that the birds move toward the source of light only on dark rainy nights when the sky is cloudy and winds are strong.

These conditions are met on most nights for a few months after August when thousands of birds descend over Jatinga.

Dr. Sengupta has some theories on how these environmental conditions guide the birds to the site between the railway station and health centre.

One theory is that such weather conditions produce a steep change in the magnetic properties of the underground water in that specified region. The resulting change in magnetic field, according to the scientists, "disturb the physiological rhythm of birds" and they react mechanically by dashing towards the light source.

Another theory is that changes in atmospheric electricity caused under the specified environmental conditions, may modify the birds behaviour. According to Dr. Sengupta there were more birds in the night skies of Jatinga during high winds with severe electric disturbances.

Dr. Sengupta who studied the bird mystery for 18 days during 1977 and 1978 came across an interesting story narrated by the village headman about how it all started.

On a dark night in September 1905, some people came out in search of a missing buffalo with "masals" (flaming torches) in their hands. The buffalo was not sighted but to their surprise the villagers found themselves surrounded by hundreds of birds that came from nowhere attracted by the light source.

They killed and ate the birds thinking these were sent by God. That was the beginning of mass slaughter of birds which continues today.

The villagers now lure the birds with bright petromax lamps. And the birds continue to arrive, kill themselves or get slaughtered while no one knows why the birds do so. And why they choose to die at Jatinga of all places on the earth."

Double Nests by Bayas: D Sidhartha reports on a dozen male bayas constructing nests near an old well at Hyderabad from 22-6-80 onwards. He writes "To my surprise some of the males after having constructed a nest with the usual chamber have taken a step further. They have constructed another chamber below the previously constructed one, the entrance the first chamber being closed. What are the possible reasons for this behaviour? Do the male birds keep constructing nests in this way until the arrival of the female baya birds?"

Great Indian Bustards: Dr. Ashok Kumar Sharma writes to say that a new home for the Great Indian Bustards has been discovered at Sokalia near Nasirabad in Ajmer District. The forest officers apparently sighted 37 bustards at this place.

According to a Government Press Report Sokalia is an open waste land covered with bushes of Ker (*Capparis decidua*). The group of 37 birds included adult males, females and juveniles and a flock of 8 birds was photographed.

Tree Pies: I had a fascinating view of tree pies some days ago. One of the windows of my study is just 3 feet away from a drumstick tree. A pair of tree pies landed on the branch and my attention was first drawn to them by their combination of musical and unmusical calls. I watched them for over 5 minutes and what I saw is well described in the Handbook Vol.5 page 219 "The pair will sit side by side a few cm. apart half turning and bobbing ludicrously at each other like mechanical toys craning their necks till the bills almost touch and uttering strange musical croaks and chuckles". I find that one of the birds presumably the male utters a piercingly loud shriek while the female does not seem to call in this fashion.

I have seen tree pies very often through the binoculars in the past. But it was only on this occasion, seeing them from 3 feet away, that I realised what truly handsome birds they are and the nuances of their courtship behaviour can only be appreciated when one is so close to them.

Little Ringed Plovers: In the third week of September a flock of Little Ringed Plovers suddenly arrived at the Dodda Gubbi Lake. They were accompanied by just one Green Sandpiper. The flock of Greenshank which are here every year are at home again, though because of the poor rainfall (We have received only 380 mm so far as against double the amount at this time last year) the lake is still a small puddle.

Magpie Robin: When we migrated from Bombay to Bangalore one of the birds we missed very much was the Magpie Robin and I was hoping that one day when the trees in our garden grew up to a respectable size the Magpie would arrive. I was delighted to see a female bird on the 20th of September and I hope that a male is also on the way.

Pesticides: The Seventh Report on Agriculture and Pollution of the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution published in September 1979 is of great relevance to us in India. Regarding pesticides the Report, page 46 says "The ecological impact of pesticides is a matter of major concern. In addition to other moral considerations, the preservation of the rich variety of nature is a matter of inherent importance to human happiness. Man is part of an intricate biological system and depends upon many species for survival. The interactions between species are complex and great care is required in evaluating the part played by any particular one. A change in the population of one species will affect many others linked to it through food chains. Although recently some species, such as the collared dove and certain gulls, have shown striking population increases, others (e.g. partridge, corncrake, large blue butterfly) have become rarer and we have received evidence suggesting that declining populations are more frequent (6). It is accepted by ecologists that most of these changes are due to the disappearance of wildlife habitats (hedgerows, marshes, ponds, coppices), although pesticides have clearly contributed to the decline of some species since the Second World War. Unless the loss of wildlife habitats can be arrested, the effect of pesticides may increase in relative importance. The organophosphorus insecticides that have partly replaced the organochlorines are much less persistent but are generally much more toxic to vertebrates; thus the drift of their sprays poses new and different hazards. The newly developed synthetic pyrethroids have different properties again and if they become widely used in agriculture, they may generate another another set of hazards. In addition to the introduction of new active ingredients there are changes in the methods of application (paragraph 3.91) and changes in the perceived necessity for crop treatment: in the latter connection we have already referred (paragraph 3.9) to the dramatic increase in the area in England treated with insecticides in order to control aphids on cereal crops.

Whitebellied Sea Eagle by Ananta Mitra

Following my last visit in 1974 I came to Digba on the Bay of Bengal just after five years. This time my naturalist friend Shri.R.N. Brahma was with me. Digba with the sea, the green forest on the shore and its bird-life is fascinating. A new embankment about three miles long has come up during the intervening years. This has fortified the shore from the ravaging sea and has enhanced many times the beauty of the place.

In the early morning on 7.10.79 we decided to move westward keeping the sun behind. Our first encounter was with Common Babbler (*Turdoides caudatus*). This particular species is uncommon in the neighbourhood of Calcutta. One after the other we met the Brown Shrike, Indian Roller, Whitebreasted Munia, Indian River Tern, Common Sandpiper, Blackcapped Kingfishers and other birds.

Soon we came to the coastal belt of casuarinas at the border of Orissa. Here on 5.11.74 during my last visit I located a majestic Whitebellied Sea Eagle (*Haliaeetus leucogaster*) on the top of a lofty casuarina over-looking the sea. This bird although common in Orissa and elsewhere is not so in West Bengal. Knowing, that the bird is very partial to its habitat I was very eager to find the bird at the locality. On the last occasion I took note of a land mark at the site. It was a tiny canal opening into the sea. Locally such a canal is called a "NALLIMO". On reaching the site I discovered that this nallimo is about a mile away from the Western extremity of the embankment and was therefore, in the unprotected zone of the coast.

Being thus exposed to the onslaught of the sea, the topography of the area has changed beyond - recognition. The sea has eroded a whole length of the shore upto a considerable depth. The large trees in the front where I located the eagle have all been swallowed up.

To protect the shore from further inroad of the waves, fresh plantation of Casuarinas has been started by the Forest Department but the young trees, by the time, have attained a height of ten to fifteen feet only.

It was apparent that the undersized trees did not have any attraction to the eagle either as a roost or as a nest. We moved up and down the shore for a considerable time and returned disappointed.

Next morning we directed ourselves to other areas and located various species including Little Brown Dove, Goldenbacked Woodpecker, Common Green Bee-eater, Redbreasted Flycatcher, Brownheaded Gull, Whiskered Tern, etc.

Our morning session was over. At about noon we were proceeding towards our hotel along the Foreshore Road within the protected zone of the township.

And lo! the bird we were looking after suddenly shot into view. None can be sure that it is the same bird but it is still the same species.

The whitebellied Sea Eagle with its wedge-shaped tail was gracefully gliding over the casuarina groves of the Reserve Forest.

As the ravaging sea was continually moving inland and was devastating its habitat it had shifted itself to the area protected by the embankment and had taken shelter in the lofty casuarinas within the Reserve Forest. Their instinct has driven them to a safer haunt and it is expected that this scarce bird-of-prey will be able to save itself in the locality and bring delight to bird lovers.

Rosy Pastors in Jaipur by Indra Kumar Sharma

Rosy Pastor (*Sturnus roseus*) roost in large numbers on a banyan tree close to the Jaipur Railway Station. Their number have been estimated at about 3,000 and when they come over in the evening they cover the sky like a large locust swarm.

Rosy Pastors begin to arrive in flocks of 7 to 40, and continue to hover around the roost site from about 10 minutes before to 10 minutes past sun set. The flocks land on any high tree around the roosting site but later all the pastors take off unitedly and take several rounds before settling on the selected tree. This is repeated three to five times and is probably intended as a signal for the late comers.

In the morning the Rosy Pastors leave the roost tree about 30 minutes before sun rise and depart in small flocks of 5 to 7 to their respective feeding grounds. They presumably go in small flocks in different directions to avoid unnecessary competition for food.

Birdwatching at Nagpur by Prakash Garde

Nagpur has a number of tanks and gardens which provide ample scope for birdwatching. The Ambazari Tank and the Gorewada Tank provide drinking water to the city and the catchment areas consists of rocky hillocks. Both these tanks abound in waterfowl during the winter months including Coots, Garganey or Bluewinged Teals, Cotton Teals, Common, Redcrested and Tufted Pochards, Pintails, Shovellers, Dabchicks, Jacanas, Stilts, Stints, Sandpipers, Redshanks, and Greenshanks. All these can be seen in large flocks.

In the Telankhedi Tank the surrounding garden is a good habitat for local as well as migratory species and it was here that one of us had seen the unusual feet of the Golden Oriole (NLBW, December 79). In the vicinity of this garden there is a cluster of trees which serves as a community roost for vultures and Pariah Kites.

About a km and a half from the Telankhedi garden are the beautifully wooded Seminary Hills and a walk along this route is always rewarding. One can see woodpeckers, flycatchers, minivets, loras, babblers, warblers, doves as well as some birds of prey including the shikra, the kestrel and the buzzard.

The maximum bird life is seen at the Sonagaon Tank and its surrounding area. This is a small tank near the airport with a stone wall bunding on two sides and mud bunding on the third, whereas the fourth is open. Beyond the water line there are agricultural fields where wheat, gram and rice is grown and beyond the fields there is thorny shrub jungle right up to the airport. This area of approximately 3 sq.km. has little disturbance and consequently is a good place for birds.

The tank fills up to its maximum capacity during the monsoon but dries completely in summer. We can see common and spotted sandpipers, little stints, blackwinged stilts, little ringed plovers, snipe, egrets, herons, white ibises, whitenecked storks, cotton teals, gadwals, wagtails, bluethroats, munias, buntings, baya, shikras, pale harriers, and marsh harriers. In the scrub jungles quails, spurfowls, grey and painted partridges can be seen.

At the Koradi Tank 12 km from Nagpur on the Chhindwara road one can see Purple Moorhens, Whitebreasted Waterhens, Bronzewinged and Pheasant-tailed Jacanas and several species of Waterfowl. The Wenna Tank about 25 km from Nagpur on the Amraoti Road is yet another place where migratory duck assemble. Brahminy Duck are quite prominent here and we were impressed by the very large numbers of the red and yellow wattled lapwings all along the 25 km track.

About 15 km from Nagpur along the Umrer road the presence of Great Indian Bustards has been reported, but we have not been able to see them so far. However during one of our visits we saw a magnificent group of blackbuck with two stags 3 does and 3 young.

(Mr. Garde has sent a list of a 171 bird species seen in and around Nagpur and this will be useful for drawing up a Checklist of Birds for the ITDC. Editor)

Correspondence

Some Known And Unknown Birds of Eastern Himalayas by Mosaddique Umar

On January 15 and 16, 1980, I happened to visit a friend's timber camp situated on the bed of Pagla river about 40 miles northwest of Tezpur town. The camp was on the Assam-Arunachal border, may be a few yards inside the latter territory. At that time of the year the river was about 2 or 3 yards wide, though its bed was 300 yards wide. The bed was steep and full of boulders - some as big as pigs, patches of sand and driftwood. The vegetation on the bed was a kind of yellow green coarse grass. Until recently, the area was covered with dense virgin forest. This was a classic example of evergreen biotope. It is now criss-crossed with tracks for extracting timber, the flesh of giants which had been standing there for centuries. The erosion bank near the camp site was about 5 ft high, gradually rising northwards to the eternal snows after countless undulations. The bank exposed a good profile of the soil which was composed of a 2 ft. humus rich layer and sand and boulders underneath.

The forest around had towering giants and dense undergrowth and was fantastically rich in avifauna. So great was the variety of birds that the old man's Field Guide to the Birds of Eastern Himalayas was not that helpful. And I explored only a small part of the area. That too superficially. The surprising absentees were emperial and other pigeons, kaleez, red junglefowl, partridge and quail. The ones I managed to identify were: spotted dove, ring dove, bartailed cuckoo-dove, black drongo, bronze drongo, redvented bulbul, redwhiskered bulbul, blackheaded yellow bulbul, scarlet minivet, blackthroated hill warbler, orangebarred leaf warbler, greyheaded flycatcher, sultan tit, grey tit, great pied hornbill, large pied wagtail, yellowheaded wagtail, whitecapped redstart, plumbeous redstart (female), two other redstarts. I could not identify Collared Bushchat, Blackheaded Oriole, Blossomheaded, Roseringed and some other Parakeets and White-eye. There were countless other unknown birds, including ground feeding ones and an owl.

My limited knowledge of birds added to my difficulties in identification without field glasses. I hope my fellow readers will identify the birds described below for me. There were many others I cannot describe because of my very limited colour vocabulary and sense of observation.

- 1) A beautiful bird. Uniform green of the shade of goldenfronted chloropsis, with a deep red, slightly down curved beak and a black nape in the fashion of blacknaped oriole which it resembles closely in build and size. I failed to notice colour of eye and feet. Perching 2 ft. above ground. Single. Nearby, a Mandelli's tree creeper like bird was climbing up a dead slump.
- 2) This one was stocky, with a short tail, of the size of a sparrow. Uniform slate blue with a bright yellow circular patch on the forehead. Feeding among shrubs 2/3 ft above ground in company with a bird with richly striped face (warbler or tit like), by the side of a forest track. Single.
- 3) Exactly like pariah kite but of stouter build, lighter colour and with broader wings. It used to stiff northerly breeze to glide around 10 to 20 ft above the river bed in search of prey. Flew for hours without a single wing beat. Glide appeared to be faster than harriers' or other kites'. Single.
- 4) A deep blue or black bird of the size of bulbul, perching on grass and bare branches, and coming down to ground for tit bits. Saw late afternoon at the edge of forest. Single.
- 5) Saw this bird on X-mas day (1979) at Nowgong. Very similar to no.2 in build and size. Had two maroon patches on either side of the "waist". These were partially covered by the wings. Rest of the body various shades of bluish charcoal. Pecking flowers on a pomegranate tree. Single.

Although I had to use all my hunting skills to stalk some of the ground feeding birds to within a few feet, I could hardly identify any species. I could not even find out whether they were thrushes, babblers or something else. I was greatly handicapped by the fogging up of my specs, of birds' continuous movement, poor light and dense undergrowth. Even then an experienced companion would have been a great help.

Exactly at 11.30 a.m. on both 15 and 16 January, I saw small flocks of blackheaded yellow bulbuls, scarlet minivets and some warbler like birds come to a small pool, formed by a little trickling stream, and bathe in turns---- just 15 yards away from our jeep. The ritual continued upto 1 p.m. The metallic noise of the Indo-Pak Test cricket commentary did not bother them. When once our driver dropped the jeep's bonnet with loud clang, all the birds, except the minivets, flew for big trees some distance away. The scarlets probably aware of the vulnerability of their bright colour and slow flight, flew straight into the foliage of the nearest tree, about 10 ft tall, and disappeared completely. This probably ensured shorter flight time and shorter visual exposure. I also noticed that, after sunset, the plumbeous redstarts fed until it was almost completely dark and were the last to go to roost.

World Pheasant Association by Kr. Suresh Singh

I would appreciate it if you will kindly inform your readers through the Newsletter that the Indian Chapter of the World Pheasant Association has been formed, with Dr.C.M. Singh as the President, Dr.B.S. Lamba as the Secretary and myself as the Administrator. Those who are interested may contact me at the above mentioned address or Dr. Lamba, Zoological Survey of India, 13 Subhas Marg, Dehra Dun 248001. Dr.B. Biswas is the Chairman of the Technical Committee. We have a programme to carry out a survey of pheasants in UP initially and would welcome some of your readers joining us as also in taking photographs and recording the calls. We would be very happy to make suitable arrangements for the camp.

Spotted Munias by PT Thomas

Identifying the Grey Plover at the lake was a memorable event. I am sure I had seen them before, but never as close as on that day, so I wouldn't have been able to say offhand that that was that.

On a morning walk in Bangalore two days ago, I saw a pair of Spotted Munias nesting in the crotch of tree branches of a roadside tree. The nest appeared to be made entirely of paddy straw with the typical lateral entrance. The next morning I saw a school boy dashing after something that flew into the nearby storm drain. He soon came up with a little Munia chick in his hands and was attempting to hide it. I did not see whether the boy had climbed the tree to rob the nest. Anyway, I talked him into putting the chick back in the nest. Since then however there is no sign of the parent birds around. I suspect that the boys went back to the nest and robbed it of the young when the area was clear of birdwatchers. Apparently there is a flourishing market for Munias here. This morning I saw two boys in a bus, each holding a Munia in their closed palms - not the chicks from my nest for these were possibly adult birds.

A trek in Ladakh by SR Shah

I am often impressed with the long list of birds seen by contributors (to Newsletter) from different parts of our country, the latest one being from V Santharam.

In my recent outing - July 19th to August 19th I saw only three birds during an 8 day bus trip in Ladakh from August 1 to 8.

- (1) Kashmir Magpie: From Kargil (west of Zojila) to LEH & HEMIS. strutting among poplars and willows on the dash of green along the river in the otherwise barren and windswept mountains. Highest altitude being 13000'.
- (2) Hoopoe in the same region. Highest altitude being 13500' soon after sighting "K.M." we invariably sighted "Hoopoes".
- (3) Blue Rock Pigeon. Were in plenty on the bus road descending from Fotu La (C14000') to Lamayuru. We saw only one bird - a Snow Pigeon - at Zajibalgal C 14000' during a 7 day trek of 55 miles of 6 lakes north west of Sonmalg viz Vishansar, Kishanshar, God Sal, Sat Sal, Gangabal and Nunkol. (August 10 to 16, 1980)

We saw no birds in a trek of 2 days near Aharbal Falls including a compulsory halt of 4 days (companion falling sick) in the beautiful Marg of Congwatan.

Of course house sparrows, mynas and crows are not considered in this note.

Review

Birds of Prey of Britain and Europe by Miroslav Bouchner, Illustrated by Dan B'arte (Hamlyn £ 1.50, 235 pp)

In the September 1980 issue of the "Newsletter" there was a review of "Birds of Prey" by Glenys and Derek Lloyd (Hamlyn - 95 p) - partly or principally concerning Britain. Thinking to buy this I went to a well-stocked local bookshop. I thought I had found it, but when I got home I found that it was a quite different book "Birds of Prey of Britain and Europe" by M. Bouchner (also Hamlyn) price £1.50 hardback pocket size.

It is strange that the titles of the two books are almost identical and both are published by Hamlyn and it may be interesting review the latter.

There is a 54 page description of birds of prey in general - divided into raptors and owls - with generalities on morphology, feeding habits, nesting etc and their relationships with man.

This is followed by 168 pages of more detailed descriptions of individual species - of 42 raptors and 13 owls with plates, the commoner species having 1-2 pages of text and two plates, one standing and one in flight.

There follow plates showing the flight silhouettes of 16 of the raptors - owls are mostly active at night, and hardly warrant flight silhouettes.

This book will certainly make a very useful field identification guide - with very useful paintings not only of the birds at rest, but also in flight - whereas the little silhouettes give a clearer idea of the birds when directly overhead.

However, there are some minor criticisms I would make. I am uncertain whether this is meant to be a really complete list of all species ever seen in Europe or whether the rarities are included or excluded at whim. For instance I was somewhat surprised to see pictured the swallow-tailed kite which I have only seen once - a group of five together - in Trinidad, West Indies. In Europe there were only "two confirmed reports" of it "brought down in Germany in the early 1900's" and to give breeding dates of a species with such a range seems unwarranted.

However, my main criticism would be that of a certain inconsistency in the plates which, from a field identification point of view are certainly the most useful part of the book. The colouring of the plates where at rest and in flight positions are depicted, is somewhat uncertain. For example the kestrel is shown at rest with a very definite chestnut brown colouration to the folded wings (P 165). In flight (P187) the chestnut colour very largely vanishes! On the other hand the Tawny Owl (P 215) is grey and white at rest but becomes very "chestnut" when in flight (P217). The in-flight picture (P93) of the lesser spotted eagle has a fair amount of white apparent, which disappeared in its silhouette (P 227). The common buzzard (P. 103,105) is far whiter in flight than it is at rest or in "silhouette". This list could easily be lengthened. It is however, very easy to be critical, not so easy to see coloured plates through the printers.

I would add that it did seem to me that the "of Britain" in the title was rather a sales "come on", since there is extremely little reference to occurrence of any species in Britain, and the reader is left, in most instances, ignorant as to whether any species actually occurs there or not.

Altogether I would say a useful field book, bearing in mind the above remarks; how comprehensive it is I am uncertain, it certainly includes several species most unlikely to be seen in Europe, let alone Britain.

F.J. Simmonds.

(We are glad that our review resulted in the sale of a book, albeit the wrong one. Editor)

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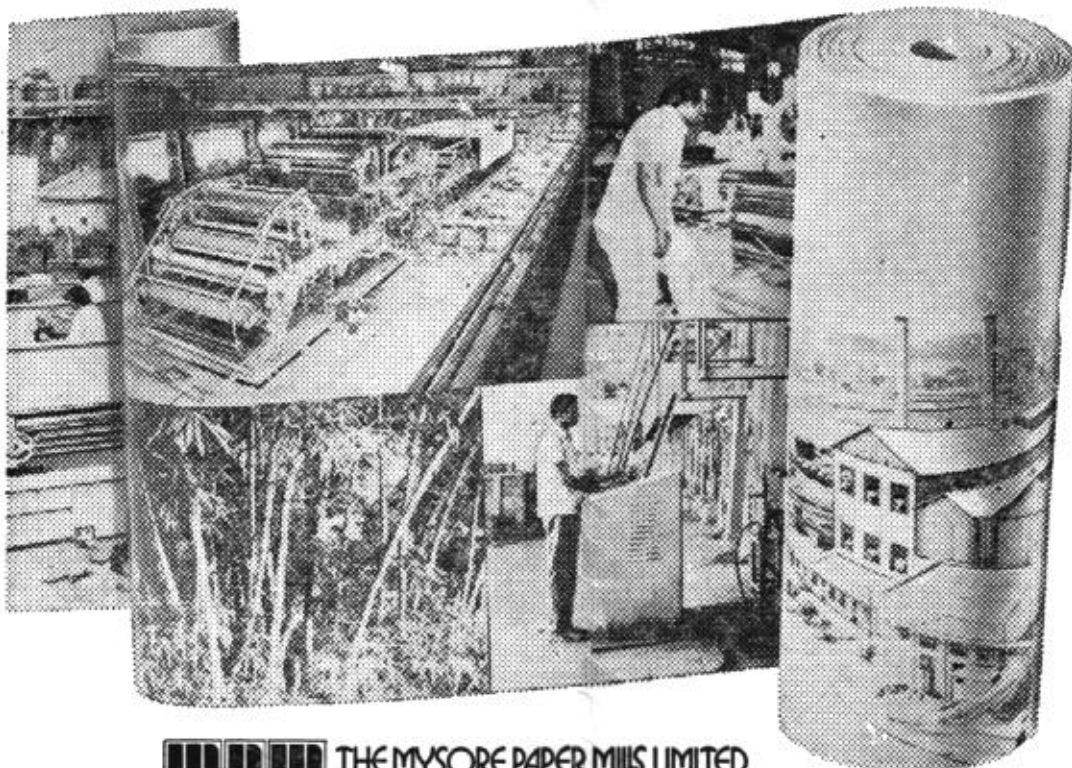
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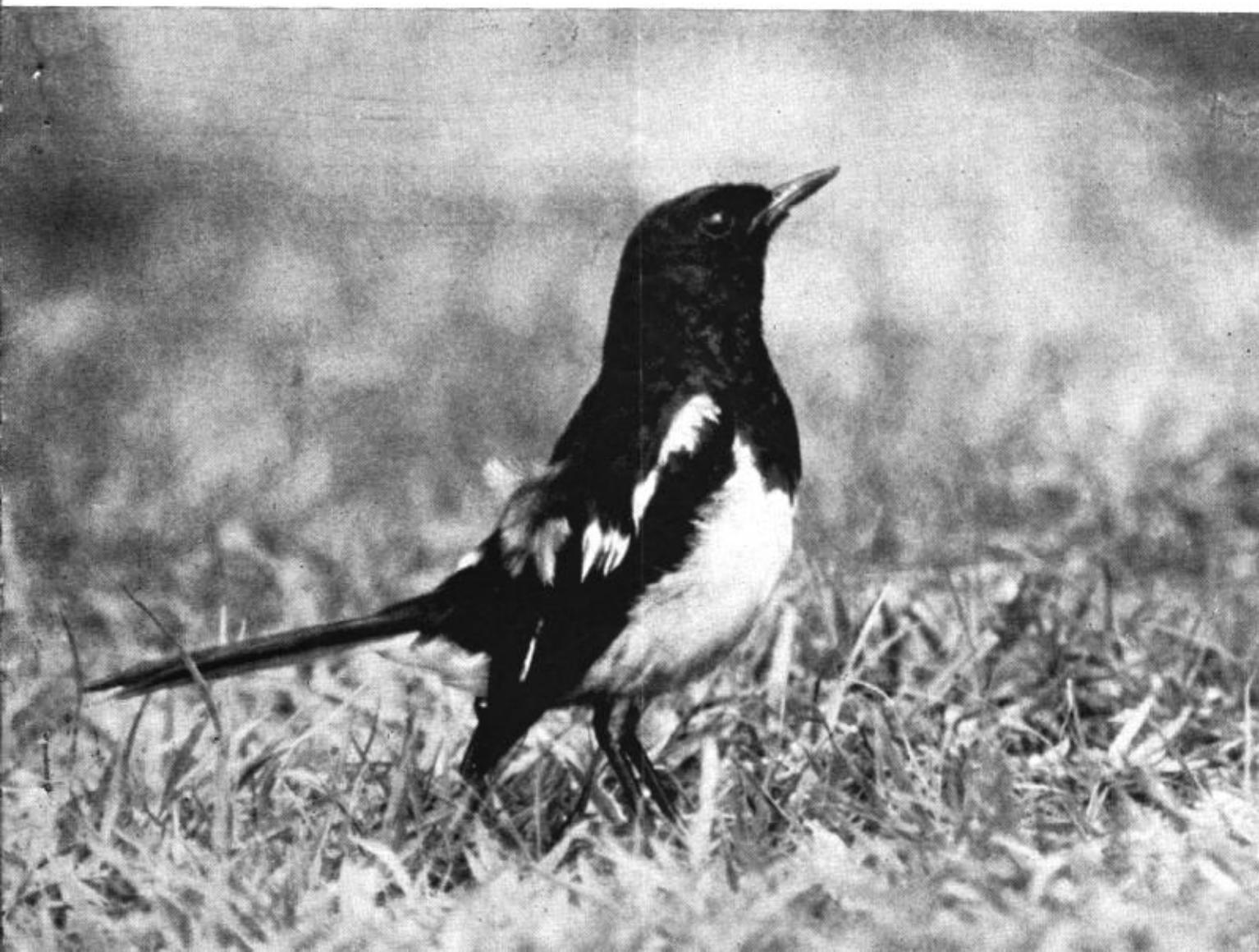
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Editorial

Duck on Dodda Gubbi Lake

On the 20th of October I saw a flight of duck flying over our house towards the lake and a few days later was delighted to find a large flock of whistling teal settled on the water. There were over 200 birds in the flock, one of the largest I have seen in this area. Perhaps the erratic monsoon this year has something to do with feeding conditions on the lake. It is only in early October that it rained rather heavily in this area. So the water level is still low and the birds have plenty of opportunity to feed in the squelch.

The group of greenshank which invariably come here in the breeding season have arrived and one evening in October I found a large number of little ringed plovers around the lake. Blackwinged stilts and common sandpipers are also around.

The embankment on the eastern side of Dodda Gubbi Lake is a clear cut division as far as the habitat for birds is concerned, for across the embankment are low lying paddy fields. This is full of egrets, pond herons and a fair number of snipe. All the pond herons fly to their roost one after another in quick succession a few minutes before sunset. Their favoured roost these days is a grove of Karanj trees about half a mile away from the Lake. In the same area there is a roost of the large pied wagtail. The birds get extremely active and noisy just before they decide to settle in for the night.

The arrival of the harrier is something I look forward to every year and I saw the first one, a pale harrier about the 25th of October.

More news on the Jatinga Mystery

Mrs. Jamal Ara says it is not correct to say that the mysterious phenomenon of birds being lured by artificial light in Jatinga in North Cachar Hills district was not known to avian biologists until it was first reported in September 79 by Dr. Sudhir Sengupta. EP Gee in his book "The Wild Life of India", published in 1964 writes of this strange happenings when he visited Jatinga with Salim Ali. Among other things Gee says "What happens is this. In a small area of hillside, about one square mile in extent and including the village of Jatinga, at a certain time of the year, and with certain weather conditions fulfilled, large numbers of birds come to petromax lamps and other such lights exposed outside. These birds get killed by sticks and later eaters."

He further writes - "The whole thing is extraordinary, because it does not take place anywhere in the valley except at this particular spot. It has been tried out again and again in other places, without any success at all. To us the spot where it takes place did not appear to be any different from other places nearby".

Migratory Birds

Several birdwatchers have now started keeping careful accounts of migratory birds in their respective localities. SN Varu gives the following information from Kutch.

Green Sandpiper	First seen on	30-6-1980
Common Sandpiper	" "	" 10-8-1980
Rosy Pastor	" "	" 24-7-1980
Pied Chat	" "	" 10-8-1980

Mr. Varu also came across some blackheaded munias in Kutch on 27-7-1980. The bird is not mentioned in the birds of Kutch. Mr. Varu writes to say MK Himmatsinhji suggested that these birds may have been escapees from a cage and finding the habitat suitable have settled down in this area.

Malabar Whistling Thrush and Chestnutheaded Bee-eater

Last month PS Thakker sent us a list of the birds he had seen in Ahmedabad, which included the Malabar Whistling Thrush and the Chestnutheaded Bee-eater. Since these birds were not known to be found in that district, we referred him to Lavkumar Khacher, who is a authority on birds of Gujarat. In response to Lavkumar's request for more details, PS Thakker writes:

"I was not very sure about Malabar Whistling Thrush on the day when I saw it for the first time near Gujarat University. On that day (17-8-1980) I was accompanied by Shri PT Patel, Lecturer in Zoology, M.G. Science Institute, Ahmedabad. After a long discussion and observations of the bird and referring to the "Book of Indian Birds" by Salim Ali, we came to the conclusion that the bird under observation must be the Malabar Whistling Thrush.

I next saw the bird in the Sabarmati Riverbed on 13-9-80 with four other members of the Drongo Nature Club, Shri Udayan I. Mehta, Club Advisor and a keen bird watcher, Shri. Tripathi M.B., Shri. Tripathi A.B., Shri. Parikh GT.

One of us spotted a blue blackbird. It was catching insects from the surface of the water. At once it reminded me of the bird I had seen the other day i.e. Malabar Whistling Thrush. But the others were not convinced, although Mr. Mehta told me that he had seen a very similar bird at Chandola Lake in August 1979 along with Shri. J.K. Dave (Zoologist, Assistant Director, Forensic Laboratory) and Shri. Chimanbhai Patel (Zoologist). But they were not very sure about it.

However I crossed the water along with Mr. Tripathi and watched the bird very carefully with a pair of binoculars for more than half an hour, running behind the bird from shrub to shrub in the different parts of

the river. Then and only then we concluded that it was a Malabar Whistling Thrush. I also referred to Vol. 9, Handbook of the Birds of India and Pakistan by Salim Ali and Ripley.

From the text one can see that it is found around Himatnagar, Surat and the Dangs, and is known as Kasturo and Indraraj in Gujarati. This seems to show that it is familiar there. Himatnagar is only 90 kms from Ahmedabad and the Sabarmati flows from Himatnagar towards Ahmedabad.

Regarding the Chestnutheaded Bee-eater I am confident of its identification. I have observed the birds (keenly and closely) continuously for ten days from 17.15 to 17.45 hrs. every evening in the month of February-March 1980.

In the Newsletter for Birdwatchers (September 1980), I came across a report on the record of Chestnutheaded Bee-eater in Madras (Only once). I saw the bird in February-March 1980 as I wrote to Shri. Zafar Futehally."

We would like to hear from other readers in Gujarat about the sighting of these two species.

The fascination of birdsongs by Asad Rafi Rahmani

What makes the study of birdsong so fascinating is that it is a language which is being increasingly deciphered by scientists. Birds live in flocks, converse with each others for the sake of keeping together. The musical 'aang-aang' of the Barheaded Goose is one example. Unfortunately their incessant conversation is their undoing as the calls give away their whereabouts to the hunters.

In order to confuse predators many birds, specially during their fledgling stage have ventriloquistic calls and only the parents know the location of the signals from the chicks.

One of the functions of the call note is to keep the foraging bird away from one another so that each bird has an adequate territory for feeding. Very often members of a flock scatter over a large area to utilise the food material in the most efficient manner. However when a predator arrives these birds which are scattered for feeding, all respond to the alarm signal by any one of them and co-operate in the attempt to chase it off.

Birdsong is divided into 3 categories; advertising or territorial song, signal song, and "emotional" song. The best developed and the most commonly uttered is the territorial song which has two functions namely to attract the mate and to repel the other of the same species. It is generally sung by the male.

The signal song does not function as a warning or a threat and is usually short and not melodious. A nesting female song sparrow for example is regularly called by her mate to eat. In this way she does not waste her time in search of food.

The third type is "emotional" song and one can only presume that birds sometimes sing for fun just as boys and girls burst into song when they are happy.

One of the most interesting types of birdsong is dueting which is not found in other groups of animals. Two birds, generally a mated pair sing simultaneously. It is mostly found in birds of dense tropical forests where it is difficult to see each other, and a pair might get lost in the thick vegetation if frequent messages are not exchanged.

A perfect duet is formed only after intensive rehearsal by a pair. Every pair has a song pattern which is unique and not shared by any other pair although some of the basic patterns of the song are species-specific.

A slightly modified form of the duet is the antiphonal song. In dueting the birds sing simultaneously while in antiphonal singing the pair sing alternately in such a way that to most people the performance sounds like the utterance of a single member. This is done so perfectly that unless both birds are in view it is impossible to know that more than one bird is singing.

Recent researches have proved that like human beings birds also have local dialects. The fledglings learn songs from their parents and with clear cut territorial boundaries during the breeding and rearing periods young birds are not likely to come into contact with strange individuals of their own species. In the white-crowned sparrow for example young males learn the territorial song within the three months after leaving the nest, so they naturally learn the characteristic song of their birthplace.

In most birds the main pattern of the song is inherited but the tone of a few additional notes are copied from their elders and in this way a local dialect is created.

It is interesting to note that in birds like gulls, puffins, guillemots, auks and ducks which breed or feed in large groups, the young ones are constantly exposed to strange noises and calls so that they are denied the opportunity of learning a specific pattern of song from their parents. They are like the children of our metropolitan cities who come in contact with a wide range of languages and develop a strange hybrid of their own.

The significance of vocal mimicry birds is not fully understood. Some scientists consider it to be a primitive characteristic while others think that it is a highly specialised evolutionary behaviour. Except

for a few species most mimic do not fully utilise the potentialities of their artistry either in food gathering or in the protection of eggs or nests. We can speculate that like humans birds also enjoy imitating others. Two of the best song mimics in the world are the Lyre-bird of Australia and the mocking bird of America. The Lyre-bird is such an accomplished mimic that it is called a one-man band. There is no sound which this fowl-sized bird cannot imitate. The chorus of cockatoos, barking of dog, sound of thunder, noise of cattle moving through brush, whistling of a school boy, weeping of a lost child, honking of car and croaking of frogs are all within the scope of this versatile performer.

In the case of the mocking bird Mimus polyglottos the bird lives up to its name. Songs of over 40 bird species are copied and improved by the mocking bird. It is curious that though they are capable of imitating almost any sound they are very selective in their choice and only some of the more melodious sounds are copied.

Swallows in Khandala by Br. A. Navarro S.J.

On the 22nd March 1936 travelling from Bombay to Khandala about a mile after Karjat Station I noticed an enormous close packed swarm of western swallows, Hirundo rustica rustica. A long stretch of posts supporting thirty telegraph wires running parallel with the railway track were packed to capacity with swallows.

The next day we went down to Karjat with the purpose of finding out the strength of such a mass gathering. Counting the posts and the length of the wires between them dividing this by the size of a single swallow we came to the conclusion that the total number of swallows sitting on the wires was 135,000.

How many more swallows were flying over the large mass of swallows sitting on the wires? Our calculation was between four to five thousand. Therefore the total strength of swallows must have been about 140,000.

A few days afterwards the whole mass of them flew off to their destination at sunrise.

Chestnut Bitterns (Ixobrychus cinnamomeus) near Calcutta by Subhamay Chatterjee

The Tripureshwari temple south of Calcutta is surrounded by a vast wooded area which is being steadily reduced because of population pressure. There are two ponds in this area one of which is entirely covered by the Water Hyacinth.

During one of our visits we saw a single bird flying towards us and in the glare of the morning sun we mistook it for a pond heron. But as the bird

flew overhead and we moved round to follow it with our backs to the sun we saw its colour and we were spellbound by its beauty. The colour can be described in many ways - Rusty Red, Tawny Brown or a Dirty Shade of Orange. The safest way to describe it would be some brand of cinnamon. The bird was obviously the Chestnut Bittern.

The Bittern landed in the dried up pond and disappeared among the dense reed bed. For the next 30 minutes we stood still to get another glimpse of the bird and we were rewarded. There were 4 of them scattered all over the pond totally invisible among the undergrowth. We could only see them when they flapped their wings or when they took to flight. One of the birds appeared from nowhere about 30 feet from us. It must have been hiding there for at least 20 minutes but we noticed it only when it ran to another part of the pond. Occasionally the Bitterns stretched their long necks, pointing skywards, showing the black and white stripes running along the neck.

The other birds in the locality were a Whitebreasted Waterhen and a White-breasted Kingfisher.

Some observations on the effect of total solar eclipse on aquatic birds
by G. Sudershan Rao & N Shivanarayan

February 16th 1980 was a total solar eclipse. Among the various studies conducted on that day was one on the effect of the eclipse on birds. Birds usually go to their feeding grounds at dawn and roost after the last feed is over, generally after sunset. This is the case with diurnal birds. On the other hand nocturnal birds start feeding after dusk and roost before sunrise. It was therefore anticipated that diurnal birds might go to their roosts during the phase of the total eclipse.

We observed the birds at Lakshmapur Lake which is located in Achampet Taluk of Mahaboobnagar District about 135 km from Hyderabad. We were able to identify the following species of birds. Shoveller, Redcrested Pochard, Cotton Teal, Coot, Dabchick, Spotbill, Pintail, Whitenecked Storks, Large Egrets, Redwattled Lapwings, Common Sandpipers, Kestrel, Gullbilled Tern, Redvented Bulbuls, House Crows, House Sparrows, Black Drongos, Whitebacked Vultures.

During the peak period of the eclipse when there was total darkness, the Redcrested Pochards and Shovellers, suddenly flew towards the shore on the North and North-east side of the lake. Some Coot flew towards the eastern side. Cotton Teal, Spotbills and some Coot which were resting on the western side of the lake flew off but settled again on the lake. Large Egrets which had been sitting on a tree on the west bank of the lake, flew away into the forest towards the north side of the lake. All these movements were abnormal and flight indicated distress behaviour. The

movement appeared to be due to panic, and was not like the roosting behaviour observed the previous day. No movements in the Whiteneked Storks were noticed.

As the darkness lifted, all the birds which had gone to the shore came back into the middle of the lake. Though the eclipse was not over they started feeding again. Egrets which had flown away into the forest, came back and perched on the same tree which they occupied previously. The behaviour of all the birds was normal once more.

Observations were also made on 17th February, i.e., one day after the Solar Eclipse and no abnormality was recorded.

The total Solar Eclipse was, therefore responsible for bringing about temporary roosting behaviour in certain birds. This abnormal roosting behaviour is attributed to a fear created in them due to the sudden onset of darkness and was not similar to normal roosting observed earlier.

Patiala - A Refuge for Woodland Birds by AK Chakravarthv

A city with woodland areas is uncommon in India, but Patiala in the Punjab is an exception. The vegetation surrounding the palaces of the Maharaja, the gardens and the woods cover a large space. The life styles of people here are interesting and varied and these areas harbour a variety of birds.

As we approached the Biradari Gardens we saw several nests of the White-backed Vultures. In the same garden there were a large number of Large Grey Babblers (*Turdoides malcolmi*) rummaging among the leaves, Woodshrike (*Tephrodornis pondicerianus*) were hawking insects in the air, Grey Hornbills (*Tockus birostris*) were feeding on berries on Moti Bagh, and Brahminy Mynas (*Sturnus pagodarum*) were also present. Pied Kingfishers were seen on the ponds in Sish Mahal.

The most notable feature of the avifauna was that there was no dominant species. We saw a large numbers of Tree Pie, Hoopoe, Coucal, Woodpeckers, Large Grey Babblers, Common Mynas, Sparrows, Pigeons, Roseringed Parakeets as well as Bluewinged Parakeets. Obviously the open and tree covered habitat of Patiala is responsible for its abundant birdlife.

Birding at Manjira by Aasheesh Pittie

I went to Manjira with BC Choudhury. As a barrage Manjira 65 km west of Hyderabad was a disappointment - there was very little water - but as a birding spot it was thrilling.

It was my first trip in a jeep into the countryside and we felt like intruders when we entered the village, the home of the buffalo and the bullock cart. The place which protects the Indian heritage is the

village but I fear that it may not be so for long. The art of the carved wooden doors and the joy of a colourful rangoli, the rugged beauty of village jewellery is declining. But the birds were exquisite and here is a list of what we saw on our journey.

Podicipediformes: Little Grebe or Dabchick

Pelecaniformes: Little Cormorant

Ciconiiformes: Little Egret, Cattle Egret, Night Heron, Grey Heron, Purple Heron, Pond Heron, White Ibis and Black Ibis.

Anseriformes: Common Teal. (More could not be identified)

Falconiformes: Whitebacked or Bengal Vulture, White Scavenger Vulture, Blackwinged Kite, Common Pariah Kite, Brahminy Kite, Shikra, Pale Harrier.

Gruiformes: Indian Moorhen, Purple Moorhen

Charadriiformes: Bronzewing Jacana, Pheasant-tailed Jacana, Stone Plover, Blackwinged Stilt, River Tern, Whiskered Tern, Redwattled Lapwing and Yellow-wattled Lapwing.

Columbiformes: Blue Rock Pigeon, Spotted Dove and Ringed Dove.

Psittaciformes: Roseringed Parakeet.

Strigiformes: Indian Great Horned Owl

Apodiformes: House Swift.

Coraciiformes: Pied Kingfisher, Whitebreasted Kingfisher, Small Blue Kingfisher, Indian Roller, Small Green Bee-eater.

Passeriformes: Crow-pheasant, Whitebacked Munia, Weaver Bird, Streaked Weaver Bird, Drongo, Brahminy Myna, Indian Myna, Tree Pie, Common Babbler, Indian Robin, Magpie Robin, Large Pied Wagtail, Blackheaded Oriole, Grey Shrike, Rufousbacked Shrike, Indian Pipit, Crested Lark and Indian Small Skylark.

Unusual nesting site of Redwattled Lapwing by Hari Prasad Patnaik

On August 10, 1980 I saw a couple of nestlings of the redwattled lapwing moving on the roof of a school building. Their parents kept a close watch over the chicks from a short distance and were occasionally indulging in the broken winged technique to draw our attention away from the young birds.

I have a feeling that the lapwing though essentially a ground nesting bird is acclimated to urbanisation. However in the unnatural habitat on the roof of a school building it laid only one or two eggs though the normal clutch consists of four.

Oystercatcher by PS Sivaprasad

On 29-8-1980 while on the look out for migratory birds opposite the All India Radio Station at Calicut we observed a large wader with a striking black and white plumage with an orange bill and reddish legs. This was the Oystercatcher or Sea Pie (*Haematopus ostralegus*).

We watched the bird for an hour while it was feeding on the shore. It ignored the house crows common sandpipers and other birds in the neighbourhood. On subsequent visits on 31st August and 1st September we found the bird on the same spot.

According to the birds of Kerala the Oystercatcher is a rarity in Kerala and no specimens from Kerala or Sri Lanka are available to determine the identity of the visiting race. Prof. KK Neelakantan writes "The Oystercatcher was last reported, if I remember right, by Jerdon from Tellicherry coast (69 km North of Calicut). During my 2 years at Dharmadam I looked for it all over the coast from Cannanore to Mahe, but never saw the bird or anyone who had seen such a bird!"

Obviously our sighting of this bird shows that Oystercatcher do visit Kerala off and on and birdwatchers must try and determine the race to which it belongs.

Correspondence

By Winston Creado

1) Mandwa - across the harbour from Bombay city, and bordering on Alibaug is the preserve of the Bombay Sailing Association. An alluring beach, with sandy stretches interspersed with sand-eroded rocks - lush trees and foliage, descending to the water's very edge - a breath taking visits of scattered cliffs, emergent from the haze, and creeping tides that ascend and ebb, with just a tranquilizing murmur - and all of it drenched in the timelessness of a tropic paradise.....

In addition to the common birds, such as bulbuls, bayas in breeding plumage, doves, robins, grey hornbills, koels, redwattled lapwings, whitebreasted kingfisher, bee-eater, I spied a black and white oystercatcher on the beach - a solitary bird, which, sadly, did not permit too close an approach.

2) There was a very recent letter in "The Times of India" written in by Mrs. Nergis Dalal, and referring to the hideous annual slaughter of birds in the Haflong district of the Jatinga Hills, east of Assam.

Every year, thousands of rare and beautiful birds, such as Paradise Flycatcher, Emerald Dove, Whistling Teal, Ruddy Kingfisher, Hooded Pitta, to mention just a few, are mercilessly slaughtered by this small village.

Mrs. Dalal states that necessary legislation has been passed to deal with the matter, but due to the extreme remoteness of the region, enforcement is plainly difficult.

I do think that the least we bird-lovers in this country could do, would be to band together and organise a way of putting a stop to this shameful and wanton destruction of so many beautiful birds.

The International Council for Bird preservation would also surely be willing to assist us in this matter.

Also, maybe, a system of incentives and appeal, together with compulsion, would help to mitigate the decimation.

I know, that I as a bird-lover would be willing to contribute funds, as well as time and energy, even, if necessary, to travel to the spot and assist in the matter.

Please contribute your suggestions and opinions to the Newsletter.

3) Well, Bombay's famous Jijamata Udyan has gone and done it again!!!....

This time, they have gone and got hold of a set 2 males (it seems). of Manchurian Blue Crossoptilane or Eared Pheasants!!! - a bird that is almost extinct in the wild.

About three years ago, they had in their possession, two pairs - I repeat, two pairs!! - of Swinhoe's Pheasants - A bird listed in the Red Data Book!!!

At that time Crossoptilans - A bird long considered extinct!!!!

The Swinhoe's Pheasants and the Brown Crossoptilans are no longer seen at the Zoo and must presumably have since died.

Why, oh why, and how and why!!, are such shoddy zoos, without breeding facilities, allowed to come into the possession of such precious birds - which are only available from the one or two pheasant Banks in the world, and should be used for restocking the wild original habitat???

4) I have just returned from a visit to Khandala (to explore the possibilities of tree-planting), and the story is the same devastating tale of massive and organized destruction of the spectacular mountain forests of the Western Ghats. So, from what I myself witnessed in a very brief spell and from the personalised accounts of responsible and concerned persons, it would seem that: The locals and tribals are employed in large scale illicit distillation for the liquor trade. From any vantage point one may look down into the forest and see numerous curls of wood-smoke issuing from serret stills.

While I was standing on the edge of the ravine behind St. Mary's Villa (one of my favourite haunts), a file of a dozen tribal youths descended the precipitous tracks to the bottom of the ravine, each carrying a pack of jaggery and a gallon tin. They stay at the bottom of the ravine all day, chopping the forest wood and burning it for their distillation flames. The liquor is supplied to all surrounding districts and towns.

Each morning and each evening, the local people engaged in illegal felling come up with the bundles of wood and load them onto the Deccan Queen to be taken towards Pune and towards Bombay - where trainloads of wood arrive each day.

The daily operation proceeds quite smoothly, as all the process is very well greased, and certain politicians are reputed to be involved.

About every two weeks, the local forest officers and rangers launch a highly farcical raid on these wood cutters and their bundles of wood at Khandala Station.

They invariably all manage to escape with their persons and bundles intact.

In remote areas, trucks are employed to carry the wood directly to its destination from the cutting points.

A well-known Ornithologist who is much distressed at the destruction of the Western Ghats Forest told me that although asked to serve on the Board of recommendations for saving the Khandala Forests by the Chief Conservator of Forests, Pune, he declined to do so, as he feared for his life, due to the political patronage the racket enjoys.

It seems to me, that we shall have to form committees as we did for the Silent Valley and carry the matter right upto and into Parliament!! If we want to save this wealth and glory of flora and fauna and this watershed that supplies the precipitation for the entire agricultural western coastland.

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ಉತ್ತಮ ಅಡಳಿತದಲ್ಲಿ 'ನಿಧಾನ' ತಡೆಗೆ ಎಡೆಯಿಲ್ಲ. ಕರ್ನಾಟಕದ ಮಾನ್ಯ ಮುಖ್ಯಮಂತ್ರಿಗಳಾಗಿ ಶ್ರೀ ಗುಂಡೂರಾವ್ ಅವರು ಅಧಿಕಾರ ವಹಿಸಿಕೊಂಡ ಕೇವಲ ಒಂಬತ್ತು ತಿಂಗಳ ಅವಧಿಯಲ್ಲಿ ಅವರು ನೀಡಿದ ಹಲವಾರು ಅಶ್ವಾಸನೆಗಳಲ್ಲಿ ಮುಖ್ಯವಾದದ್ದು 'ದಕ್ಷ ಅಡಳಿತ' ತಮ್ಮ ಅಶ್ವಾಸನೆಯನ್ನೇ ಕಾರ್ಯರೂಪಕ್ಕೆ ತರಲು ಜಡಭರಿತ ಕಡತಗಳ ವಿಠೇ ಮಾಡಲಾಗಿದೆ. ಇಂದು ರಾಜ್ಯೋತ್ಸವದಂದು ಯಾವುದೇ ಬಂದು ಹಳೇ ಕಡತವು ಪರಿಹಾರ ಕಾಣದೇ ಉಳಿದಿಲ್ಲ? ಕೆಲವೇ ತಿಂಗಳಲ್ಲಿ ಸರ್ಕಾರ ನೀಡಿದ ಅಶ್ವಾಸನೆಗಳೇನು? ಸಾಧನೆಗಳೇನು? ಎಂಬುದನ್ನು ಗಮನಿಸಿದಾಗ.....

ಉತ್ತಮ ಅಡಳಿತ ನಡೆಸುವ ಫಲ. ಅನುಗುಣವಾಗಿ ನಡೆಯುವ ಆಶಯ ಅಶ್ವಾಸನೆಗೆ

ಶಾಂತಿಪಾಲನೆ, ಪ್ರಗತಿ ಸಾಧನೆ, ಕಲ್ಯಾಣ ಸ್ಥಾಪನೆ. ಇಂತಹ ಹತ್ತು ಹಲವಾರು ಕಾರ್ಯಕ್ರಮಗಳನ್ನು ಜಾರಿಗೆ ತರುವ ಅಶ್ವಾಸನೆಗಳ ಸರಮಾಲೆ.

ಈ ಹೊಸ ಸರ್ಕಾರ ಒಂಬತ್ತು ತಿಂಗಳ ಹಿಂದೆ ಅಧಿಕಾರ ವಹಿಸಿಕೊಂಡಾಗ ಒಂದು ಪ್ರವಣಣ ವಚನವನ್ನು ಸ್ವೀಕರಿಸಿತು.

'ಕೇವಲ ಅಶ್ವಾಸನೆ ನೀಡುವುದಲ್ಲ ನೀಡಿದಂತೆ ನಡೆಯುವುದು' ಅಧಿಕಾರ ವಹಿಸಿಕೊಂಡ ಒಂಬತ್ತು ತಿಂಗಳ ಈ ಅಲ್ಪ ಸಮಯದಲ್ಲೇ ಸರ್ಕಾರ ತನ್ನ ಅಶ್ವಾಸನೆಗಳನ್ನು ಹಲವು ವಿಧಗಳಲ್ಲಿ ಕಾರ್ಯರೂಪಕ್ಕೆ ತಂದಿದೆ.

ಶಿಫಾರಸು, ಪ್ರಭಾವಗಳ ಪಲಾಯನ

ಹೊಂ ಯಾರಿಗೆ ಎಲ್ಲಿಗೆ ಬೇಕು ಅಲ್ಲಿಗೆ ವರ್ಗ! ಯೋಗ್ಯತೆ ಇರಲಿ ಬಿಡಲಿ ಕೊಡಿ ಅವನಿಗೆ ಬಡ್ತಿ ಇದು ಕತ್ತಲಲ್ಲಿ ಕಂಡ ಕನಸಲ್ಲ... ಸಂಯಾದ ಪ್ರಭಾವ ಬೀರುವ ವ್ಯಕ್ತಿಯನ್ನು ಹಿಡಿದಲ್ಲಿ ಹಿಂದಿನ ದಿನಗಳಲ್ಲಿ ಏನು ಬೇಕಾದರೂ ಸಾಧಿಸಬಹುದಾಗಿತ್ತು. ಆದರೆ ಈಗ ಅದ್ದಲ್ಲ ಗತಕಾಲದ ಕಥೆ ಇಂದು ಕಾಯಿದೆ, ಕಟ್ಟಳೆಗಳು ಎಲ್ಲರಿಗಾಗಿ ಸಾರ್ವಜನಿಕರ ಹಿತಕ್ಕಾಗಿ, ಕೇವಲ ಕೆಲವೇ ಜನರ ಹಕ್ಕಲ್ಲ. ಎಂಬುದನ್ನು ಎಲ್ಲರಿಗೂ ಮನದಟ್ಟು ಮಾಡಲಾಗಿದೆ.

ಪ್ರಭಾವಿ ವ್ಯಕ್ತಿಗಳ ಹಿಂದೆ ಮುಂದೆ ಇದ್ದು ಕಾರ್ಯ ಸಾಧನೆಗಳನ್ನು ಮಾಡುತ್ತ ಮರೆಯುತ್ತಿದ್ದವರ ಸೊಲಜ ಇಲ್ಲವಾಗಿದೆ.

ಕಡತಗಳು.....ಕಣ್ಣು ಬಾಯಿಪಿಟ್ಟು, ಉಸಿರು ಕಟ್ಟಿ ಇನ್ನು ಕಾಯಬೇಕಾಗಿಲ್ಲ

ಸರ್ಕಾರದ ಅಪ್ಪಣೆಗಾಗಿ, ಉತ್ತರಕ್ಕಾಗಿ ಕಳುಹಿಸಿದ ಕಾಗದ ಕಡತ ಸೇರಿ ಜಡಬರಿತವಾಗುತ್ತ ಪ್ರತಿ ಭಾರಿಯೂ ನಿಧಾನ ತಡಕ್ಕೆ ಒಂದೊಂದು ಕಾರಣ ಕೇಳುತ್ತಿದ್ದುದು. ಮತ್ತೊಂದು ಗತಕಾಲದ ಮಾತು.

ಪ್ರತಿಯೊಂದು ವಿಷಯದಲ್ಲೂ ತೀವ್ರಗತಿ ನಿಷ್ಠೆ ಕಾರ್ಯ ತತ್ಪರತೆಯ ಮಹತ್ವವನ್ನು ರಾಜ್ಯ ಮಟ್ಟದಿಂದ ತಾಲ್ಲೂಕು ಮಟ್ಟದವರೆಗೂ ಎಲ್ಲ ವಲಯಗಳಲ್ಲೂ ಇದೇ ನಿಲುವು ಮನವರಿಕೆ ಮಾಡಲಾಗಿದೆ.

ಈಗ ನಿರ್ಮಿಸಿರುವ ವಾತಾವರಣದಲ್ಲಿ ಯಾರು ತಮ್ಮ ಕೆಲಸಗಳಿಗಾಗಿ ಅಲೆದಾಡುವ ಅವಶ್ಯಕತೆಯಿಲ್ಲ ಅಷ್ಟಕ್ಕೇ ನಿಮ್ಮ ಮನೆಗಾಗಿರಲೇ ತಮ್ಮ ಅಗತ್ಯಗಳೆಲ್ಲವುಗಳ ಪೂರೈಕೆ.

ಕೆಲವು ನಿದರ್ಶನಗಳನ್ನು ನೀಡುವುದಾದರೆ ಕಡತಗಳ ವಿಲೇವಾರಿಯ ಈ ಎರಡು ತಿಂಗಳಲ್ಲಿ ಸುಮಾರು 2½ ಲಕ್ಷ ಫೈಲುಗಳು ವಿಲೇವಾರಿಯಾಗಿವೆ. ಕೋರ್ಟಿನ ತೀರ್ಮಾನಕ್ಕಾಗಿ ಕಾದಿರುವ ಕಡತಗಳು ಮಾತ್ರ ಇನ್ನೂ ತೀರ್ಮಾನವಾಗಬೇಕಾಗಿದೆ.

ಜಡತ್ವಕ್ಕೆ ಜಾಗವಿಲ್ಲ

ಸರ್ಕಾರ ಕೈಗೊಂಡ ಮತ್ತೊಂದು ಪ್ರಮುಖ ನಿರ್ಧಾರ, ನಾಯಿಕೊಡೆಗಳಂತೆ ಹುಟ್ಟಿದ ಹಲವಾರು ಅನಾವಶ್ಯಕ ಮಂಡಲಿ ಸಮಿತಿಗಳ ರದ್ದು ನಾನಾ ರೀತಿಯ 36 ಅನುಪಯುಕ್ತ ಸಂಸ್ಥೆಗಳ ರದ್ದು ಸಾರ್ವಜನಿಕ ಬೊಕ್ಕಸಕ್ಕೊಂದು ಭಾರಿ ಉಳಿತಾಯ.

ಪಾತಕಿ ಪಾರ್ಥೇನಿಯಂ

ನಗರದ ಸುತ್ತಮುತ್ತಲಿನಲ್ಲಿ ಹರಡಿ, ಅರಳಿದ ಪಾರ್ಥೇನಿಯಂನ್ನು ನಿರ್ಮೂಲಗೊಳಿಸಿ ಸುಂದರ ನಗರದ ಸಸ್ಯ ಸಂಪತ್ತನ್ನು ಹೆಚ್ಚಿಸುವ.

ಈ ಭಯಂಕರ ಕಳೆ ಮಾರಕ ಎಂಬುದನ್ನು ಅರಿತು ಈಗಾಗಲೇ 2,000 ಎಕರೆಗೂ ಹೆಚ್ಚು ಕಳೆಯನ್ನು ಕಿತ್ತು ಧ್ವಂಸ ಮಾಡಬೇಕಾಗಿದೆ. ರಾಜ್ಯದ ಎಲ್ಲ ಭಾಗಗಳಿಗೂ ಈ ಕಾರ್ಯಕ್ರಮವನ್ನು ವಿಸ್ತರಿಸಲಾಗುತ್ತದೆ.

ಜಮ್ಮತದಿಂದ ಬಂದಾಗುವ

ರೈತಬಾಂಧವನ ಕ್ಷೇಮಾಭಿವೃದ್ಧಿಗೆ ಸರ್ಕಾರ ಎಂದಿಗೂ ಬದ್ಧ. ಅವರ ಹಿತವತ್ತಿಯನ್ನು ಕಾಪಾಡುವುದೇ ಸರ್ಕಾರದ ಹಂಬಲ. ರೈತರ ಸಮಸ್ಯೆಗಳನ್ನು ಕೂಲಂಕಷವಾಗಿ ತಿಳಿಯಲು ಸರ್ಕಾರದಿಂದ ಸಮಿತಿಯೊಂದರ ನೇಮಕ. ರೈತರ ಈಗಿನ ಅಶಾಂತಿಯಿಂದ ಮಾತ್ರ ಸರ್ಕಾರ ಜಾಗೃತ ವಾಗಲಿಲ್ಲ. ರೈತರ ಹಿತರಕ್ಷಣೆಯ ದೃಷ್ಟಿಯಿಂದ ಸರ್ಕಾರ ಅವರಿಗೆ ದೊರಕಿಸಿಕೊಟ್ಟಿರುವ ಸೌಲಭ್ಯಗಳು ಹಲವಾರು.

ಪ್ರಥಮ ಹಾಗೂ ಮುಖ್ಯವಾದದ್ದು ಒಂದು ಕೋಟಿ ರೂಪಾಯಿಗಳ ನೇರ ಪರಿಹಾರ ರೈತರ ಕಲ್ಯಾಣಕ್ಕಾಗಿ ಸುಮಾರು 85 ಕೋಟಿಗಳ ವೆಚ್ಚದಲ್ಲಿ ನೀರಾವರಿ, ಕೃಷಿಸಾಧನ ಉತ್ತಮ ಕೈಬ್ರಿಡ್ ತೀ, ರಸ ಗೊಬ್ಬರ ಮುಂತಾದವುಗಳ ನೀಡಿಕೆ. ನೀರುದರ ಅಭಿವೃದ್ಧಿ ತೆರಿಗೆಗಳ ರದ್ದು ನೀರೆತ್ತುವ ಪಂಪಿಗೆ ಬಳಸುವ ವಿದ್ಯುತ್ ದರದಲ್ಲಿ ಕಡಿತೆ ಕೃಷಿ ಉತ್ಪನ್ನಗಳ ಮೇಲಿನ ತೆರಿಗೆಯನ್ನು ಸಣ್ಣ ಮತ್ತು ಮಧ್ಯಮ ಹಿಡುವಳಿದಾರರ ತಕಾವಿ ಬಾಕಿಯ ರದ್ದುಮುಂತಾದವು ರೈತರ ಒಳಿತಿಗಾಗಿಯೇ ಕೈಗೊಂಡ ಕ್ರಮಗಳು.

ಕೃಷಿ ವಿಮಾ ಯೋಜನೆ ಪ್ರಸ್ತುತ ಐದು ತಾಲ್ಲೂಕುಗಳಲ್ಲಿ ಪ್ರಾಯೋಗಿಕವಾಗಿ ಪ್ರಾರಂಭವಾಗಿದೆ. ಇಷ್ಟರಲ್ಲೇ ಈ ಸೌಲಭ್ಯ ಇತರ ರೈತರಿಗೂ ದೊರೆಯಲಿದೆ.

ಕಟ್ಟು, ಕಡ್ಲೆಕಾಯಿಗೆ ಕನಿಷ್ಠ ದರದ ನಿಗದಿಯಲ್ಲದೇ ರೈತರಿಗೆ ಹೆಚ್ಚಿನ ಪರಿಹಾರ ಹಾಗೂ ರಿಯಾಯಿತಿಗಳನ್ನು ನೀಡಲಾಗಿದೆ. ಈ ಪುನರ್ವ ಮರ್ಶಿತ ದರ ನಿಗದಿ ಕೇಂದ್ರ ಸರ್ಕಾರ ಶಿಫಾರಸು ಮಾಡಿರುವುದಕ್ಕಿಂತ ಅಕರ್ಷಕವಾಗಿದೆ. ವ್ಯವಸಾಯಕ್ಕೆ ನೀಡಬೇಕಾದ ಪ್ರಾಧಾನ್ಯತೆಯನ್ನು ನೀಡಲಾಗಿದೆ—ರೈತರಿಗೆ ದೊರೆತ ಬೇಕಾದಂತಹ ಎಲ್ಲ ಸವಲತ್ತುಗಳನ್ನು ದೊರಕಿಸಲಾಗಿದೆ. ಜೀವವಿಮೆ, ಕ್ಷೇಮನಿಧಿ ಮುಂತಾದ ಸೌಲಭ್ಯಗಳನ್ನು ರೂಪಿಸಿ ಅವರ ಅರ್ಥಿಕ ಸಂಪತ್ತನ್ನು ಸುಧಾರಿಸಲು ಮಹತ್ತರ ಹೆಜ್ಜೆ ಇಡಲಾಗಿದೆ. ಈ ರೀತಿಯ ಸವಲತ್ತುಗಳನ್ನು ಬೇರೆಯಾವ ರಾಜ್ಯ ಸರ್ಕಾರವೂ ಇದುವರೆವಿಗೆ ನೀಡಿಲ್ಲ.

ಅಶ್ವಾಸನೆಯನ್ನು ಇನ್ನೂ ಹಲವು ವಿಧಗಳಲ್ಲಿ ಆಚರಣೆಗೆ ತರಲಾಗಿದೆ.

- ಕಲಾವಿದರಿಗೆ ಮಾಶಾಸನ, ಗೌರವಧನ.
- ನಿಮ್ಮ ಮತ್ತು ಹಿಂದುಳಿದ ಪಂಗಡಗಳಿಗೆ ಹೆಚ್ಚಿನ ಉದ್ಯೋಗ ಭರವಸೆ.
- ನಿಮ್ಮ ಮತ್ತು ಹಿಂದುಳಿದ ಪಂಗಡಗಳಿಗೆ ಉತ್ತಮ ಬಡ್ತಿ ಅವಕಾಶಗಳು.
- ಮರ್ಬಲ ವರ್ಗದವರಿಗಾಗಿ ಒಂದು ಲಕ್ಷ ಮನೆಗಳು.

- ಉತ್ತಮ ಗ್ರಾಮ ಸಂಪರ್ಕ ಯೋಜನೆ (18.7 ಕೋಟಿ ರೂಪಾಯಿಗಳು)
- ಪ್ರತಿ ಹಳ್ಳಿಗೂ ಕುಡಿಯುವ ನೀರಿನ ವ್ಯವಸ್ಥೆ.
- ನಿವೃತ್ತಿ ವಯಸ್ಸನ್ನು ಹೆಚ್ಚಿಸದೆ, ನಿವೃತ್ತಿಯಾದವರ ಮರು ನೇಮಕ ಮಾಡದೆ ನಿರುದ್ಯೋಗಿ ಯುವಕರಿಗೆ ಹೆಚ್ಚಿನ ಉದ್ಯೋಗ ಅವಕಾಶಗಳ ನೀಡಿಕೆ.
- ಜ್ಞಾನ ಮಂದಿರಗಳ ನಿರ್ಮಾಣ—ಶಾಲೆಯ ನಂತರ ಮಕ್ಕಳು ಅಭ್ಯಾಸ ಮಾಡಲು ದೀಪ ಮತ್ತು ಇತರ ಸಲಕರಣೆಗಳ ವ್ಯವಸ್ಥೆ.
- ಪ್ರತಿಯೊಂದು ಶಾಲೆಯಲ್ಲಿ ಶಾಲಾ ಆರೋಗ್ಯ ಕಾರ್ಯಕ್ರಮಕ್ಕೆ ಅನುಕೂಲ ಕಲ್ಪಿಸುವ ಯೋಜನೆ.
- ಆರೋಗ್ಯ ಕೇಂದ್ರಗಳಲ್ಲದೆ ಕಡೆ ಸಂಚಾರಿ ಆರೋಗ್ಯ ಕೇಂದ್ರಗಳ ವ್ಯವಸ್ಥೆ.
- ಬೀಡಿ ಕಾರ್ಮಿಕರು, ನೇಕಾರರ, ಮತ್ತಿತರಿಗೆ ಗುಂಪು ವಿಮಾ ಸೌಲಭ್ಯ.

“ಆಗಲಿ 25ನೇ ರಾಜ್ಯೋತ್ಸವ ದಿನ ಸರ್ಕಾರ ಪೂರೈಸುವ ಅಶ್ವಾಸನೆಗಳ ಮಹೋತ್ಸವ ದಿನ”

ಪ್ರಕಟಣೆ: ಕರ್ನಾಟಕ ಸಾರ್ವಜನಿಕ ಇಲಾಖೆ, 5, ಇನ್‌ಫೆಂಟ್ರಿ ರಸ್ತೆ, ಬೆಂಗಳೂರು - 560 001

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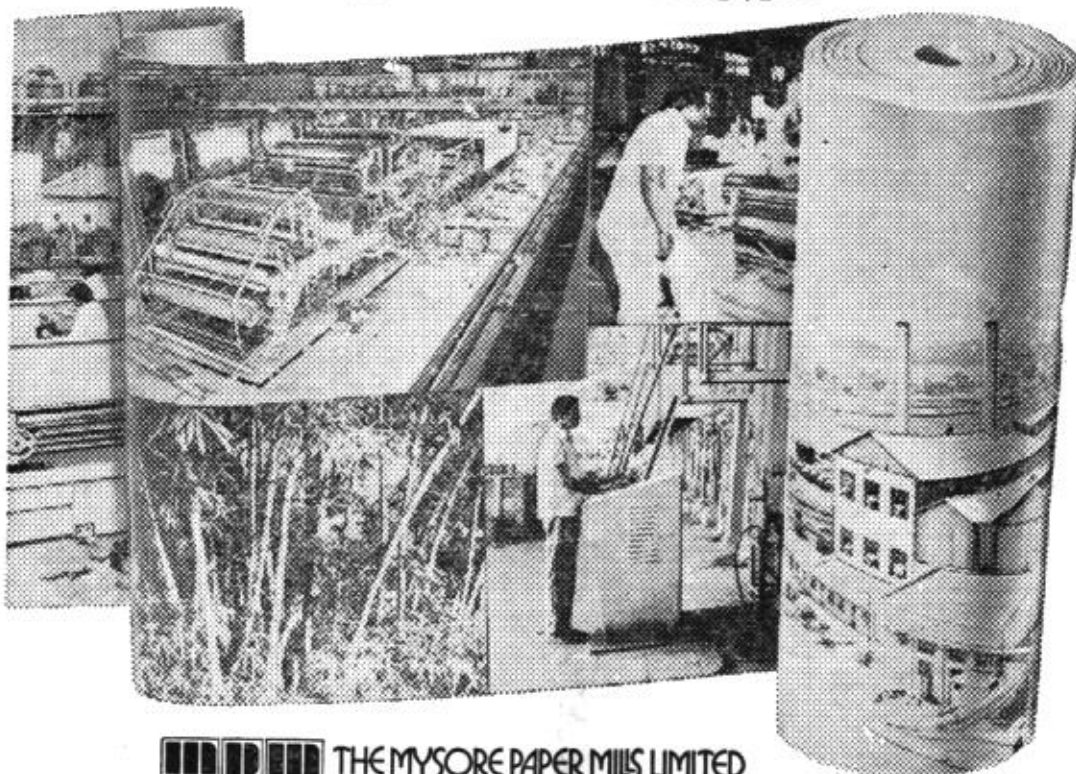
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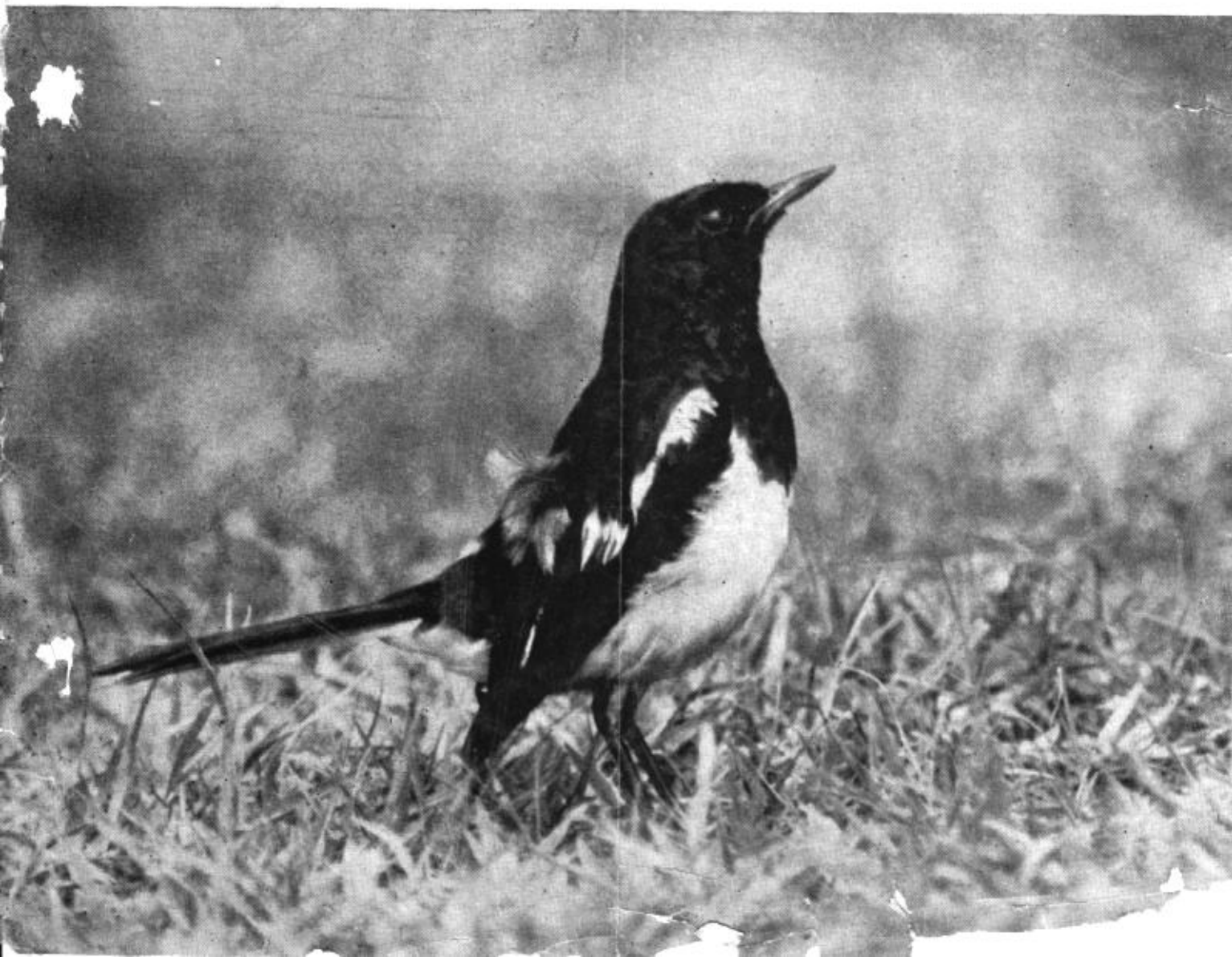
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Photo by: Vijayakumaran Nair

Newsletter for Birdwatchers

VOL. XX NO. 12 DECEMBER, 1980



NEWSLETTER
FOR BIRDPWATCHERS

Vol.XX No.12

December

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Editorial

Checklists of Birds of Tourist Centers

In response to the Editor's request checklists have been received of the following areas.

Jaipur: By Dr. Ashok Kumar Sharma & By Mr. YM Rai

Madras: By Mr. V. Santharam

Pune: Mr. Prakash Gole and by Mr. Sanjay Dattatraya Moghe

The Chairman of India Tourism Development Corporation has approved of this project and he has confirmed that we can go ahead. More checklists from other Centers will be welcome.

The Non-Violent Scientific Study of Birds by JBS Haldane

Mr. Acharya Dwarakanath wrote to the Editor suggesting that this paper by Haldane should be reproduced. It was included in the Bombay Natural History Society Journal of December 1959. It would not be appropriate to reproduce the paper in full but here are a few paragraphs to whet your appetite.

"Is there any possibility of counting all the breeding members of an Indian bird species? I suggest that the most hopeful targets are the large flamingo Phoenicopterus antiquorum, and the smaller species Phoeniconaias minor. The former breeds in the Great Rann of Kutch and the latter possibly in the Little Rann. The Lesser Flamingo, which lives on unicellular algae, is not apparently found in many other localities except Sambhar Lake in Rajasthan. The Rann of Kutch is unsuitable for walking but, owing to the absence of trees, it should be possible to photograph nesting birds from the air. This can of course only be done by the Indian Air Force. In peace time the armed forces have to carry out exercises of various kinds. Their efficiency can be better gauged from their performance against natural forces, for example the rapid replacement of bridges destroyed by floods, or the landing on a difficult coast, than by their prowess against 'enemies' who they know will not hurt them. Hence such co-operation would, I believe, increase the efficiency of our Air Force.

So much for mere populations or densities per square mile. But how do these increase or decrease? Observations on a few hundred or even a few dozen nests of any species will tell us the average number of eggs laid per year. More careful, but not very arduous, watching will tell us how many young birds per nest survive to start flight. On the whole tropical

birds produce fewer eggs in a clutch than birds of the same species or a closely related species in a temperate climate. This is at least partly due to the shorter tropical days, which do not give the parents time to feed a large brood. Most of the comparisons have been made by Moreau with African birds, but Lack (1950) points out that in India Parus major (the Great Tit) has an average clutch of 3 compared with 10 in England. This difference must be compensated in one of two ways. Either the average number of clutches in India must be greater or the mortality less. There must be a balance because if, for example, the numbers in an area increased by only 10% per year for a century, the density would increase 13,781 times. This can of course happen when a new species occupies a country, but not with established species. In only one case has this balance been directly demonstrated by comparison of statistics. In Switzerland the Starling (Sturnus vulgaris, a bird very similar to the myna) lays more eggs than in England, but dies younger. It will be easy to get data on numbers of broods in India, not so easy to get data on mortality. Before I speak about mortality, let me say a few words on the feeding of young!

International Symposium on Bustards:

Dr. Ashok Kumar Sharma has sent a report on this Symposium and here are some excerpts.

"Present Distribution of the Great Indian Bustard:

Maharashtra: The bird has been recorded from Ahmednagar, Sholapur, Aurangabad and parts of Bid and Osmanabad districts. The total bustard population in Maharashtra is estimated to be about a 100.

Gujarat: Number of birds estimated between 50 to 75. A promising habitat is the completely protected Dadhli grasslands near Jasdan.

Karnataka: The bird has been reported from Ranibennur, Dharwar, Bellary and elsewhere.

Madhya Pradesh: Birds have been seen in various districts of Madhya Pradesh including Shivpuri and Gwalior.

Rajasthan: Mr. Kailash Sankhala and JP Kapoor maintain that the Great Indian Bustard is holding its own in Rajasthan. About 53 birds have been sighted in 7 locations in Jaisalmer district and it is

estimated that the population of the bird is about 200 in the Jaisalmer District alone. The bird is restricted to a zone northwest of a line from Bikaner to Phatodi to Miajlar. It is found in both cultivated fields and grasslands. It is also reported near Kota and Ajmer. The Desert National Park with an area of 3,000 km. has been established in Jaisalmer and Barmer districts. Also an area of 17 sq.km. around Shokalia in Ajmer district has been declared closed to shooting for ten years.

Protection Strategy: The Symposium suggested that the trapping and breeding of the bird in captivity was not desirable. The involvement of local people and educating them about conservation was important if species like the bustards were to be saved.

Houbara Bustard: The Secretary of the ICBP Bustard Group said that about 20,000 of the Houbara Bustards winter in Pakistan of which approximately 3,000 are killed every year.

Arabian Bustard: The representative of Saudi Arabia informed the meeting that about 40 Arabian Bustards are left in his country and this was possibly the first indication in recent times that the birds exist there at all."

Birding in Poona

Mr. Nikhil Kumar reports the sighting of Cliff Swallows nesting under the bridge on Pavna River. A Purple Heron was also seen at Pashan Lake on 27th October after an absence of 3 years.

Laboratory Studies on Migration Impulses

Dr. Asha Chandola has sent a few scientific papers (too scientific for the Editor) relating to laboratory studies of birds. One paper deals with the Premigratory Increase in Circulating Triiodothyronine/Thyroxine Ratio in the Red-Headed Bunting (Emberiza bruniceps). This suggests that Thyroid hormones could be involved in the development of premigratory disposition. The Daily Rhythmicity of Thyroid Function in Spotted Munias has also been studied, and the abstract says:

"The thyroid gland of Spotted Munia, a subtropical finch, exhibits a distinct seasonal variation. The results of the present experiments indicate that there also exists a daily cyclicality in the thyroid activity of this bird. In the first series six groups of 10 birds were established (12L/12D; $28 \pm 2^\circ\text{C}$). A tracer dose of carrier-free ^{131}I was injected, into one group at a time, at 6-hr intervals

beginning at 0700 hr. Birds were killed by decapitation 24 hr after the isotope injection and their percentage thyroidal uptake of ^{131}I and plasma protein-bound iodine (PB ^{131}I , following trichloroacetic acid precipitation) were determined. Circulating labeled thyroxine (T_4) was also determined following extraction with methanol and chromatographic separation in an amylol-2N NH_4OH solvent. In the second series, 20 birds were killed at four different hours of the day (0100, 0700, 1300, and 1900 hr) and plasma triiodothyronine (T_3) and T_4 levels were estimated by radioimmunoassay. T_4 levels ranged from 1.5 to 4.0 ng/ml and T_3 levels from 0.3 to 1.3 ng/ml, in 24 hr. In both series, all parameters of thyroid function registered a significant circadian variation declining to minimal values during the night period (except for T_3). Maximal values were reached during the day period. The rhythm in thyroid activity, as judged by the above parameters, may, therefore, be associated with the diurnal habits of Spotted Munia."

Avifauna Project of BNHS

SA Hussain the Project Scientist writes to say:

"We have started two research stations, one at Point Calimere Sanctuary, Thanjavur District, Tamil Nadu and another at Ghanna Bird Sanctuary, Bharatpur, Rajasthan to monitor the movement of migratory birds and to study the population structure of avifauna in selected habitats. The study involves large scale ringing, colour marking, population estimation, habitat studies, assessment of carrying capacity of selected plots, vegetation, prey species etc. We have a multi-disciplinary team consisting of Marine Biologists, Botanist, Entomologist, Ornithologist and Ecologist.

As a part of our study we will be dye-marking wading birds like the Curlew Sandpipers, Ruff & Reeve, and other similar waders. We are using three dyes, Blue, Red & Yellow. These dyes will be sprayed on specific parts of the birds according to the schedule.

DYE PATTERN

		Blue	Green	Yellow/Orange
VE	Breast	0B	0G	0Y
NT	Belly	1B	1G	1Y
RAL	Vent	2B	2G	2Y
DO	Crown	3B	3G	3Y
RS	Mantol	4B	4G	4Y
AL	Rump	5B	5G	5Y
WI	Left	6B	6G	6Y
NG	Right	7B	7G	7Y

OBSERVATION DATA

Species	No. of Birds in Flock	Colour Code	Place	Time	Date
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The purpose of dye making is to study the flock composition, movements etc of waders in their wintering quarters.

The Birdwatchers are requested to keep a lookout for these birds and inform us of any sightings. Information on Date, Time, Locality and number of birds seen as well as position of dye on the birds may kindly be passed on to Project Scientist, at BNHS or Sr. Field Biologist, Avifauna Project, Kodikkarai - 614807.

The members of Birdwatchers Newsletter may be interested to know that in the last three months we have ringed over 8000 birds (both waders & land birds) at Point Calimere Sanctuary."

"Binoculars for Sale"

Binoculars, "Asahi Pentax" 12 x 50, rarely used; as good as new. Sturdy case; "foldable rubber rings on eye-piece for use with glasses. Rs.1,600/- or near offer. Owner has two pairs, hence offering one for sale. Contact P.T. Thomas, 14, Old Sehore Road, Indore (M.P.), Telephone - 4218/6694.

Madhav Gadgil's Prize

Readers will recall that we had announced Madhav Gadgil's prize for population studies of Koel. No entries have come in. So the prize is carried over to the coming year. To refresh your memories the original announcement was as follows.

".....The song of the male Koel is one of the most noticeable of bird songs in our country, and must serve as a good indicator of its breeding season. I suggest that we mobilize all the readers of the Newsletter to keep as accurate a record of the song of male Koel this year as possible. The readers could decide to record the total number of breeding calls of male Koel (the well-known kuhu-kuhu) one hour after sunrise throughout its breeding season. The number of calls would be small at the beginning, reach a peak at the peak of the breeding season,

and then decline. If we have such records from all over India, we could get a nice picture. In addition the readers could keep any other records of Koels breeding that is possible. All readers should then be invited to send in their accounts. I propose three prizes for these reports 1st - Rs.75, 2nd - Rs.50, 3rd - Rs.25. Let us hope to get a good response."

On Navigation in Darkness and Location of Individual Nests in Some Birds
(Extracts from Clive K. Catchpole) by V. Santharam.

In the July 1978 (Vol. XVIII No.7) issue of the "Newsletter for Birdwatchers", Mrs. Margaret P Walkey wrote a very interesting article on "so-called Indian Edible-nest Swiftlets (*Collocalia unicolor*)" describing the sighting of these swiftlets and their nests at the Tiger Caves just outside Doty. The author had concluded with some very thought-provoking lines to quote. "Plant and animal life normally demands light, yet the young swiftlets hatch out and spend the early part of their existence in pitch darkness, while the adult birds alternate between light and darkness apparently having no difficulty in adaptation from one to the other. This puzzles us. So does their ability to locate their individual nests and to fly very rapidly out of such dark tunnels. Do they use some form of radar? Do they take their bearings by echoes from the clicking sounds they make?".

Recently going through the fine booklet by Clive K. Catchpole entitled "Vocal communication in Birds" (published by Edward Arnold, London - Price £ 2.40p) I found some of the probable answers to some of these questions. The following which is reproduced from the above-mentioned booklet, may be of some interest to our readers. I quote (from page 13):

"Another unusual example is the use of special calls by various cave-dwelling birds, such as the oil bird (*Steatornis capripensis*) from South America, and cave swiftlets of the genus *collocalia* from South East Asia. These birds produce a series of clicks when flying in darkness, and appear to have an echo-locating sonar system similar to that possessed by bats. Unlike bats, the calls are not ultrasonic, but produced at normal frequencies and so can be clearly heard by humans. In the oil bird, the clicks are produced in darkness, and in short bursts with intervals of a few milliseconds between them. When landing on a dark cave ledge the click rate increases, but if a torch is switched on, it decreases or stops altogether. Oil birds fly safely in darkened experimental rooms, but if the ears are plugged they crash into the walls. Cave swiftlets increase their rate of click production as they penetrate deeper into their dark caves. Griffin and Suthers (1970) found that in a darkened experimental room *Collocalia vanikornensis* produces clicks between 4.5 and 7.5 KHZ and can avoid wires as small as 6 m.m. in diameter. The special sonar system is obviously an

adaptation which allows these species to colonize and breed successfully in the shelter of dark caves. It also suggests that the birds are capable of resolving echoes a few milliseconds apart, a feat which does not seem unlikely considering the evidence presented earlier on auditory time resolution in birds (see chapter 1.2). Whether the clicks which have a relatively wide frequency range are used in intraspecific communication as well as navigation is not known....".

Regarding the location of individual nests, page 17 says:

"There is now evidence from a number of species, that a call may contain enough information to transmit the identity of a particular individual. Furthermore, it can also be shown that others in the population react to such calls in a manner which suggests that they are quite capable of individual recognition by sound alone. Many observers have noted the apparent ease with which parents returning with food locate their young in the vast, densely-packed colonies of breeding seabirds. The very fact that parents feed and maintain their young in family groups, and not on a communal basis, suggests that individual recognition must occur. Although visual information may play some part in this, most parents give special calls well before landing and the young react before the parent actually appears.

"Tschanz (1968) working on the guillemots (*Uria aalge*) was the first to demonstrate individual recognition by sound in a colonial seabird. To obtain positive proof of recognition, two things must be demonstrated. First, the calls must be individually distinct to form a physical basis, and secondly, the mate or young must react significantly more to the particular call to their mate or parent than to the calls of other individuals. Tschanz was able to demonstrate both in the guillemot, and used two types of playback experiment to confirm recognition. In one, presentation of the parental call alternated with a control call and in the other a choice was given by presenting the call simultaneously with the control call using two speakers. In both cases the results were quite clear, the young birds responded only to the calls of their parents. Measures of response included orientation to the speaker, approach, contact, pecking at it as though begging for food, and giving calls. Control calls from other adults or chicks usually resulted in staying or going into hiding and actually avoiding the speaker".

References cited:

- Griffin, D.R. and Suthers, R.A. (1970) Biol Bull, 132, 495-501.
Tschanz, B. (1968) Z. Tierpsychol, Beiheft 4.
-

The Chestnutheaded Bee-eater (*Merops leschenaulti*) by P.T. Thomas

I was a little bit intrigued by the editor's note (September 1980) on the Bee-eaters, especially the Chestnutheaded kind. With 'only one known record from Madras', is one to think that this bird is officially assumed a rare one in the South, generally? Or, does the supposed rarity apply only to Madras?

When I spent a few weeks between mid-January and the first week of March 1980 at the campus of the Christian Medical College in Vellore (5-6 km. away from town, on the Tiruvannamalai Road) I used to see a large number of these Bee-eaters in the campus and in the surrounding areas. At least, I took them to be the Chestnutheaded Bee-eaters, and they answered well to the description of them in the Handbook, IV, 744. The most obviously noticeable feature in their physical appearance was the yellow throat bordered by the rufous and black gorget (except that the black was more a transverse line, marking off the yellow throat from the light green breast, than a gorget.) I had no reason to think that these birds were anything but the Chestnutheaded Bee-eaters, but if the bird has indeed been always thought scarce in the Madras area (and generally in that part of the country, more or less) I should begin to wonder if I made a wrong identification after all.

THE CMC campus is largely scrub jungle liberally interspersed with a large variety of shrubs and trees, and bordered on two sides with paddy fields, including a largish irrigation tank at one corner. The Bee-eaters - both the Chestnutheaded and the Small Green (*Merops orientalis*) showed an obvious preference for the more jungly parts of the campus where they perched on twigs or the overhead electric wires. It was not only that the Chestnutheaded were common in themselves, but also that they out-numbered their 'Small Green' relations - usually the more plentiful of the two everywhere - by almost three to one.

I was back in the same place for a week in May when it was devillishly hot and dry. Much to my surprise (or was this only to be expected?) there was not a single Bee-eater of either kind about at that time. I should think, then, that the Chestnutheaded Bee-eater is a very common bird in at least that part of Tamilnadu (the North Arcot district) in the time of year that may be called the winter months in North India, and simply the less hot months in the South. If the editor's query concerned only the occurrence of the bird in Madras, say Madras city and its environs, this is not an answer. In any case, I go along with the editor in hoping that perhaps Mr. Santharam, Mr. Bhaskaran or Mr. Krishna Raju, or any of the others who are more knowledgeable than me on the ornithology of South India, will care to say something.

Correspondence

Nests of Cliff Swallows occupied by Common Sparrows by PS Thakker

A colony of cliff swallows exists under a bridge of Sabarmati river at Ahmedabad. During the last four years I have been a frequent visitor of this place.

During one of my visits in September '80 (13th September), I noticed a peculiar situation. On that day I was accompanied by Mr. Tripathi, Club Advisor of a Nature Club and a school teacher. We saw the nests of cliff swallows housed by common sparrows. These nests were not deserted ones but the birds were there in a large number.

I think it is extraordinary to find cliff swallows' nests inhabited by common sparrows in the presence of cliff swallows in such a large number.

Flying Accidents by Harkirat S Sangha

In the June-July (1980) issue of the Newsletter I read about the Death of a Quail. Such accidents are not uncommon, and occasionally birds survive.

I once saw a House Sparrow crash into a clothes line. The bird was stunned and fell heavily on the ground. Apparently it received no serious injury and in few minutes it recovered and flew off.

During the kite-flying season in Jaipur, I have observed Blue Rock Pigeons after hitting the kite line. Pigeons flying fast find it difficult to make a sudden change of course. As a result they frequently collide with the line. Often the impact is so mild that the birds are not injured. Sometimes they fall and are taken by dogs and other predators.

Anting by Brahminy Myna by Prakash Garde

I had read that birds use ants for disinfecting themselves, either by allowing the ants to crawl over their bodies or actively manipulating them so that the formic acid secreted by the ants rids the bird of ticks or lice.

I was therefore thrilled to see this mode of behaviour enacted in my own garden by a Brahminy Myna on two different occasions. First I found the bird sitting on the ground with its wings spread on either side and touching the ground. It was sitting quite motionless except for its head which had to be moved to keep a sharp vigil all around. After a short while, the bird flew away and I examined the site to find ants in an area of about four square feet.

On another occasion I observed a Brahminy Myna approach a hole in the ground from which large black ants were coming out. The bird picked up one ant after another and rubbed it on the underside of its wings - particularly the wing-tips. It seemed to be picking up the ants by choice and not at random. The bird also ate a few ants. But it did not eat those which it had used for its 'toileting'. After the bird had gone away, I found 5-6 ants lying dead or dying at the site.

Big Concentration of Water Birds near Patdi, Bazana Creek by Y.H.Chhaya

We were surveying and taking photographs in the little Rann of Kutch of Wild Asses at the end of March 80. A big flock of ducks flew over head and landed half a km. away. We found that there were a large number of Brahminy Ducks at the edge of the saline creek, and we were somewhat surprised to see these 30 or 40 birds on the edge of the desert. We assumed that these Brahminy Duck were on their return migration to their breeding grounds in Ladakh and Tibet. We also saw a number of other birds including blackwinged stilts, common sandpipers, Ruff and Reeve, wagtails, grey heron, little egret, common teal, bluewinged teal, shoveller, common and tufted pochard and white storks.

It might be noted that this year there were unexpected rains in the middle of November due to which there was plenty of water in the creek. Apparently Pelican and Flamingoes also visit this area in winter.

Status of the Blue Eared Pheasant by Suresh Singh

I was much interested in reading an item under correspondence written by Mr.W. Creado regarding the fate of pheasants at the Jijamata Udyan. I fully share his concern for keeping birds or for that matter any animal if proper arrangements cannot be made. In this context it is very important that the zoos should select only those species which can be acclimatised to that particular area. Perhaps the two species mentioned by Mr. Creado are not a very good choice for Bombay because of the hot and humid climate during part of the year and they should have selected species like the Junglefowls, Kalij and Gray Peacock pheasant which would have a better chance of survival since these can tolerate high temperatures and humidity better. The Firebacks would also be suitable.

Further, Mr. Creado's observation that the Blue Eared Pheasant is almost extinct in the wild is not quite correct. Of the three species of eared pheasants - White, Brown and Blue the last is the only species which is not listed in the Red Data Book, Vol. II, 2nd Revised Edn., 1979. In fact according the well known pheasant authority, Howman (1979, Pheasants Their Breeding and Management. KR Books: Horncastle, Lincs), "It (Blue Eared Pheasant) is the most common of this group in captivity and is thought to be still fairly abundant in the wild." Interestingly enough, the current price for a pair of adult birds in UK is : White eared (endangered) £400, Brown eared (endangered) £70, Blue eared £30 and Swinhoe's (endangered) only £20. As you know it is comparatively easy for the

recognised zoos to get birds in exchange with other animals and even the Wild Life Protection Act makes special provision for the needs of a zoo. I feel that every zoo should make a serious attempt to breed any animals that it has so that the precious animals are no longer needed to be caught from the wild. I wish some of our zoos would emulate the example set by Mr. Gerald Durrell of the Jersey Zoo.

I should also like to see many more articles which describe some new or interesting observations made by the author himself and not merely a rehash of information which can be found in books or even a list of birds seen in a particular locality. Unless of course it shows a new locality.

Our Contributors

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